

# Explorations in Inclusive Catholicism

Proceedings of the  
2022 Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School

August 1-12, 2022

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## Preface

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, our world made a paradigm shift from in-person encounters, to virtual gatherings and meetings. Independent Catholic clergy in the United States were no exception. Having gathered in Austin, Texas for “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht,” our first in-person interjurisdictional encounter on October 24-27, 2019, clergy of that experience continued to meet for a monthly teleconference call. With the widespread outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 and an increasing awareness of Zoom, we now had a new way to meet with one another – and to see one another’s faces!

We had planned a second interjurisdictional gathering for the fall of 2020, which was scuttled for obvious reasons. Instead, we hosted our first virtual summer school on July 6-17, 2020, an event that was attended by over 100 lay and ordained leaders within our movement. In the view of many, it was a tremendous success.

In 2021, we supported our spiritual siblings of the Dutch Old Catholic Church by not scheduling a summer school ourselves, instead recommending that clergy and laity of the English-speaking world attend the virtual Utrecht Summer School on Old Catholic theology. As vaccinations spread and we began to emerge from the pandemic, we hosted our second interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas, Nevada on November 4-6, 2021. It was at that gathering that we began to see a more widespread use of the phrase “Inclusive Catholic” as a way to describe those within the “Independent Catholic” movement – veritably a term liked by few – who embrace sacramental justice for our siblings of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Utrecht summer school resumed in person on July 4-15, 2022, and Father Marek Bożek and I were privileged to travel to Utrecht and be part of the first cohort of students to attend Week 2 of the in-person experience. It was during that week that we took seriously the strong encouragement of Father Paul Leary of the Reformed Catholic Church International, that we host a 2022 virtual summer school. During the next two weeks, we pulled together and spread word of a two-week learning experience attended by over 50 lay and ordained leaders. This work shares the proceedings of that event.

We thank all speakers, presenters and panelists for their time and the many insights that they shared into so many facets of our movement. We

also thank all who joined us for this experience and enriched our conversations. In a special way, I also wish to thank Carlos Alonso for his assistance with so many details “behind the scenes”: setting up registration sites, overseeing payment and the issuing of stipends, posting class videos, generating the transcripts for these proceedings, and so much more.

May these proceedings assist us all in our continued explorations of Inclusive Catholicism!



## **“Farther Along Our Many Paths”**

### **A Keynote by Bishop John Plummer**

I first came across this movement in the early- to mid- 1980s, now nearly 40 years ago. You may be familiar with my outdated book, *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement*, which may or may not be congruent with your own understanding of our movement.

If there is anything that can be said of churches of our variety – Old Catholic, Independent Catholic, Independent Sacramental, Free Sacramental, Autocephalous Orthodox, whatever you want to call this – it is that we have and follow many paths. Sometimes the diversity of paths is bewildering, even for us! Some paths for instance, might make no claim to be Christian, but might point to the importance of apostolic succession and some forms of the sacraments. Some paths might include a wide range of theologies, some of which may not be mutually intelligible. What are we doing? Does each priest, bishop or jurisdiction jump on their preferred theological horse and ride out into their own territory, perhaps even changing horses two or three times along the way? We all know that happens, and perhaps some of us have done it.

I submit to you that unbridled diversity, with no center, leads nowhere – at least nowhere that one would want to go. To find genuinely helpful ways forward, we must find and cleave to the One who calls us, the One who is our Center, our Axis, our Goal. If our many paths are actually going somewhere, other than mutually-exclusive corners of clerical eccentricity, then our many paths must lead to the risen and living Lord Jesus Christ. Anything else is at best a waste of our time and a betrayal of our priestly vows.

Our job every single day – in our prayer, our study, our proclamation of scripture, and our work at the altar – is to make a space where those we serve can meet Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with us in these ways when we approach Him in Word and Sacrament. He has made us priests forever – and forever has no end, so there’s no getting out of it!

If our many paths are leading to the One Lord, then we have at least a common direction, and we can find ways of working with, being with and traveling alongside others who are also called by Jesus, whether inside or outside the Independent movement.

Most of us have inherited adherence to the Nicene Creed, and to the Trinitarian and Christological teachings of the early councils. With these gifts in hand, we are well-positioned to stay focused on the One who has died, risen, and is coming again, and whose Spirit, even in this moment,

animates the life of the Church. When this confession is lost, everything is lost.

We do not have to think of those outside of our confession as any less loved of God. Doubtless, lots of good is happening in those places, and the Spirit is at work in ways that we see or don't see. But our calling is to confess the Lord Christ. As the priest's prayer of thanksgiving at the end of the Tridentine mass says: The liturgy is "our bounden duty."

We know that we share our trust in the risen Christ, not only with others in our movement, but with larger Christian churches, and yet we are where we are: not in larger, mainstream churches or large, overarching denominations, but here in our little, fragmentary movement. Hopefully, that is because we feel truly called to this way of being the Church. Many of us likely started out in the larger churches and felt pushed toward the Independent movement as we were being excluded or vocationally blocked in those churches. Women cannot discern their call to the priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church. A trans man who longs to fully participate in the life of the Church, without restrictions, cannot do so within the Greek Orthodox Church, except as the recipient of a quiet, patronizing pastoral economy. Those reasons can be a good place to start, and it's a great grace that the Independent movement has been a refuge for such folks for many decades. George Hyde, the founder of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, for instance, was creating a church space for gay men in Atlanta in the 1940s. That is something that we should all look to with admiration.

That said, having been drawn into the smaller, sacramental churches of this movement, we must ask whether this is truly our home—or whether it is merely the second-best "landing spot." We might say, "I really, really want to be a priest with Rome, and I'll always pine after that, longing for the recognition of the parent who didn't love me enough...but if Rome won't let me be a priest, then I'll be a priest over here!" This is common, but can be disastrous if not resolved. Serving in one place, while really wanting to be somewhere else, just doesn't end well. Think about marrying someone as a compromise substitute for who you really wanted to marry!

Even if it takes a lot of time and patience, one ultimately has to discern whether one's calling is to the larger churches—which includes living with the difficulties in those churches—or to the Independent movement. It's not a case of "better" or "worse": They're simply different paths, different locations in which God has placed us. Our challenge lies in fully welcoming this place. In her work, *The Call of God*, Evelyn Underhill suggests that God most often calls us in "the ordinary world where we

find ourselves." If this is where you find yourself, stop fighting it! You don't have to live in a constant wish that you were somewhere else. Be here with joy, and see with open eyes how you can live out your vocation as a Christian and as a priest in this place! Most of us have likely reached the point of knowing that "*these people are my people. This is my way of being Church. This is where God has called me to serve!*" Or perhaps we're praying and asking the Spirit to guide us into such knowledge of God's will for us. We are the churches of the margins: small, different and given to our own ways of following Christ.

Some of us don't love the word "Independent." Theologically, the word is somewhat problematic – but it sticks to this movement like glue. You can't get rid of it. People have tried to rename us in different ways, and inevitably they come back to "the Independent movement." It's who we are. The people and the churches who are drawn into this movement are wildly, eccentrically independent, and all attempts to herd all the "cats" into one "bucket" result in explosions! We create loose networks of friendship for collaboration and common work, and that can be very fruitful – but no attempt to jam us into a denominational structure has worked in the decades in which I've been in this movement. We just *are* "the Independent movement." We may not love the word, but I see no way to avoid it. It captures well those who are called into this way of being Church.

Hopefully, we are convinced that, in our wild diversity and stubborn-minded independence, we are a constituent part of the Church of Jesus Christ. It follows that the Spirit is active and moving in our midst, for the Holy Spirit always animates the Church – including our version of the Church. We must look carefully, prayerfully and discerningly at our way of being Christ's Body, to see if we might understand just a bit more about how the Spirit is working in our midst. Thus, we come to a better appreciation of our paths, not apologizing for ourselves or wanting to be like the larger churches, not trying to imitate them or ape them in any way, but finding our own way and how the Spirit is with us.

Given the social and financial situation of some of those larger churches, which are collapsing in various ways and leaving them more and more in situations not unlike our own, the wisdom that we gain in how to live well in our own situation might just become our offering to our brothers and sisters in those communities as they navigate new and changed situations for themselves.

Today let's focus on three aspects of our many paths: our heritage and identity, our spiritual formation, and our priestly life.

First, let's look at our heritage and identity. One of the great benefits of the Independent Sacramental Movement—or whatever term you prefer—is how varied our heritage is. At this point in our story, after many decades of cross-fertilization between jurisdictions, most of us can claim an extraordinarily-blended “church/family tree,” with roots in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Moravian, Methodist and other sources. We have a wealth of liturgical and theological resources that we can draw upon as legitimately part of our own story. Far beyond technical claims to apostolic succession in ordinations and concentrations, there's so much more here to explore—like liturgy, theology and history—to increase the sense of how we are related quite closely to so many different Christian communions.

The flip side, however, is our need to clearly and authentically communicate who we really are. This is especially true for those of us with words like “Catholic,” “Orthodox,” “Anglican” and the like in our church names. I have this problem, too. I serve a jurisdiction called the “Holy Orthodox Church, American Jurisdiction.” In many cases, of course, we have inherited these names. Others of us have chosen such names. Such words come with a venerable history in our particular communities. These words are significant theological, liturgical and historical markers. However, we have to acknowledge that when people hear the word “Catholic,” 99.999% of the time, they think of the “Roman Catholic Church.” When they hear “Orthodox,” they think of churches in canonical communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate or with Russia—with the large Orthodox churches. It does not help when we lead people into confusion or misidentification by saying without context things like, “We are the Catholic Church, too!”

We should be very clear and honest in our self-presentation, as we have plenty of reasons to be proud of our tradition—as well as reasons why we would *not* want to be erroneously identified with Rome, Canterbury, Constantinople, or, for that matter, Utrecht. Moreover, in building local relationships with other area parishes, a high degree of transparency is helpful. Clergy from some of the larger sacramental churches can have the impression that we are trying to confuse their congregants, or trying to pretend to be them. In truth, we know that this has happened and does happen. It can also be confusing to visitors. We had a Coptic Orthodox man visit our parish the past two Sundays, who noticed that our creed is the same, and our liturgy is similar to his, but he asked, “There are lady priests? And there are marriages of two men?” We were so far outside his “boxes”! We were a world that he had never encountered, so I suggested that we have coffee one day, since it was far

too much to explain in that moment. I guarantee you: If you asked him today about our church, he would be very confused about the type of church that he visited – despite my efforts to explain it as accurately as I could.

If clergy from larger churches and denominations know that we are honestly and straightforwardly presenting our own ecclesial identity, and that we are working to prevent confusion, a space opens for understanding and collegial relationships.

One of my predecessors was not careful about such matters. He had a photo of the Ecumenical Patriarch hanging in the parish narthex, and he commemorated him in the liturgy, as if we were in communion with him. He was kicked out of the local Greek festival, where he showed up in clerical dress. It was enormously counterproductive – but I now have a personal and friendly relationship with the Greek, Armenian and Ethiopian pastors of our community. They know they're not in communion with me, and I know I'm not in communion with them. We understand one another, we get along, and nobody's trying to misrepresent themselves. We even get along with the Southern Baptists and Methodists in the neighborhood: Before COVID, we had a monthly pastors coffee group, we did a Thanksgiving food drive and joint Holy Week activities – obviously not with the canonical Orthodox – and the Methodists thought that our Holy Thursday service was really interesting! There's a great deal of curiosity about who we are. People have never heard of us. And so we find that we don't need to focus solely on our historical relationship with Roman Catholicism or with canonical Orthodoxy.

Let's talk about our spiritual formation.

In addition to thinking about how we present ourselves externally, we might also look internally, to how we are allowing God to form us. If we form ourselves and our clergy well, our inner spiritual formation will flow out of us in the way we present ourselves to the world.

How are we staying connected to Christ? How are we being formed and reformed in Him? Thankfully, the Lord is more than able to work through highly inadequate clergy – but how much better we could serve Him if we strove to join ourselves to His self-giving, making a sacrifice of ourselves, so that He might work more fully in and through us for others!

In this regard, we should not think that we are behind others from larger churches. Personally, I attended Vanderbilt Divinity School, a very mainstream seminary, which offered exactly zero formation in this regard. *Nada.*

Ongoing, lifelong formation of priests is a huge topic. As someone inside our movement, I offer a few guidelines that I share with the clergy with whom I work.

Melody Rawson, a friend of mine for many years, lives in Australia, where she and her husband, John, have been training and ordaining priests for many decades, so they've developed a whole wealth of materials. Melody's key guidance to the newly-ordained priests is extremely simple, direct and effective: (1) Celebrate mass every day, (2) Meditate and pray every day, (3) Read and study scripture every day. If these three things are done faithfully, the new priest—as well as the experienced priest—is much, much less likely to go “off the rails.”

For some, the idea of a daily celebration of the Eucharist may seem old-fashioned. We may have heard people say that the mass should always be celebrated in community. To such objections, I would reply that the mass *is* always done in community, even if you are physically alone. The community of all the living and the dead, the angels and the saints, and all those for whom we're praying are powerfully and immediately present at the altar—even if only the priest is present in body. The Eucharist is the Church's most potent prayer of intercession, the place where the priest offers him or herself and all those they serve to Christ, for transformation every day. Of course, this does not have to mean a fully-vested, hour-long liturgy.

Some in our movement, like Paul Blighton and Michel Collin, have developed shorter forms of the liturgy that are devout, yet appropriate for a working person celebrating at home before heading into the day.

Some forms might even stretch beyond formal celebration. I know one priest who, due to her failing vision, memorized the entire liturgy, which she prays as an inner meditation when she is unable to celebrate the whole mass. That's very lovely, to think that we can offer ourselves: Our body and blood can be the elements as we pray the liturgy, even without candles and chalices.

Another bishop very wisely has the practice of asking persons who are preparing for ordination to completely memorize the canon of the mass, the Eucharistic Prayer. That itself is a great exercise for interiorizing the prayer.

Mass doesn't have to be an enormous thing: When Melody and John are finished with breakfast, they clear away the breakfast dishes and they very simply set their breakfast table with candles and a chalice and paten for their celebration of mass.

Myrna Montague is an Australian priest who was ordained with Melody. She owns a day spa in the gay area of Melbourne, and she lives in an apartment upstairs. She has an altar in her home, and every morning she says mass, praying for all of her employees and her clients. She jokes that she keeps her employees so busy that she has to do their praying for them! Most people don't know that Myrna is a priest or that she's saying mass upstairs for them, but surely the grace of the Eucharist, in the inner shape of self-gift and offering, flows into Myrna's whole day, including the way she runs her business and the way she interacts with people. One could take a lesson from Myrna in various ways, but especially in how the grace of the sacraments can flow out through a priest's whole life. Whether in a religious context or in everyday moments, the interaction with a clerk at a store, or a stranger on the street, the new life given in baptism, the freedom of absolution, the self-gift of the Eucharist, and so on, move—or at least should move—in all of our interactions. Blessing becomes the keynote of our being, even if no one is consciously realizing that in religious language.

The sacraments should live in us and move through us as gift and offering to the world every day, all the time. There was an old, Baptist radical, Will Campbell, best known for his semi-autobiographical novel, *Brother to a Dragonfly*, who, like a "desert father," lived on a goat farm outside of Nashville, and people would trapse out there to see him with their difficulties and problems. A Methodist minister once visited him, saying, "What is my ministry? I have to find my ministry!" Will responded, "Your ministry is whatever is right under your nose!" I think that's accurate: We go on various quests in our lives, but most of the time our actual ministry *is* the very people and in the very places that are right under our noses. Working in the priesthood that has been given to us, we just have to figure out how to meet that in the Spirit.

As with the Eucharist, so with the Word: Every day, we should be receiving the Word through scripture, whether that's in the readings of the liturgy, or in the breviary, in other prayers, or in our academic or devotional study of the text. These written forms of the Word are witnesses to the living Word, the risen Christ. Just as with the sacraments, we receive Christ in the Word in living and active ways. He moves in us, He changes us, and is conveyed again to the world through us and through our words.

Most of us have had the privilege of meeting people whose conversation about the most mundane things is shot through with a luminosity and presence that's hard to explain, but that shines directly from Christ. I'm very much reminded of the late Independent bishop

John Schneyder of the Orthodox American Church, who lived in Queens, New York. Seraphim Sigrist of the Orthodox Church in America, who was a friend of this quirky, cat-rescuing bishop, remarked that the really striking thing about John Schneyder, that was so different from so many of us, was that in him the “inside” and “outside” were in perfect sync, that his interior life was transformed in Christ in such a way that his outer demeanor and words—whether counseling someone, buying subway tickets, or chasing a kitten down the street—reflected that interior radiance into the world. May that be so for all of us.

The line between Word and Sacrament is actually very blurry, if it even exists at all—since scripture is found in all of the sacraments. Bishop Francis Hodur, the founding bishop of the Polish National Catholic Church and an episcopal ancestor of many of us, taught that the proclamation of the gospel, read and preached, *is* a sacrament, *is* a meeting place with Christ in the world. In the Eucharist, in the largest cathedral and in the smallest living room, the living and risen Jesus Christ comes to meet us.

We’ve looked at Melody’s recommendations for daily Eucharist and daily encounters with scripture. Both of these are embedded within her third recommendation for daily prayer and meditation. The Eucharist *is* prayer, and scripture is found within it: in the readings. We most often approach our study and devotional reading with prayer—at least with an attitude of prayer, if not with formal prayer. But there is an important place for daily prayer by the priest beyond the Eucharist. Priests living in the world with secular jobs—and I have a 60-hour/week job that has nothing to do with Church—have to determine how best to incorporate such a practice. Perhaps that might be a part of the breviary, or some other regularly-scheduled discipline amid the demands of our lives. It might be a time in the morning, or a time in the evening, instead of seven times spread throughout the traditional monastic day. Even a small, regular “something” is better than a scattered irregularity or nothing.

Two months ago, I was at a friend’s retreat in North Carolina, and the priest, Karen Rivers, who was leading the retreat, spoke of the importance of regularity in one’s prayer life. Someone said, “I just can’t do that. I just don’t have time!” Karen looked at him and said, “Get up earlier.” It might take getting up earlier, or figuring out how to use our lunch hour at work, but it’s possible if you really see the importance in it and decide to do it.

The state of the soul, the appropriate disposition for the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments, is formed in priests through regular, disciplined prayer. In 1922, Rudolf Steiner, who was best known for



Waldorf education and biodynamic agriculture, was involved in the founding of the *Die Christengemeinschaft* (The Christian Community), an Independent church in Germany. He told the founding priests of that community that the observance of their breviary was necessary – not a good idea, but *necessary* for the celebration of the sacraments. This is a good reminder of just how important and crucial prayer really is.

We’ve looked at who we are – our heritage and identity – and some aspects of how we might be formed in Christ to live out that identity. Now let’s look at the priesthood, especially through the lens of our movement. What is the priesthood?

Very few of us grew up in the Independent Sacramental Movement, or in Independent Catholicism (or however we might describe our own ecclesiastical location), so most of us arrived here with preset ideas of priesthood, or Christian ministry more generally. We brought these ideas with us from our former churches or from the broader culture. Some of these ideas may be helpful, but many of them may need adjustment to serve us within our context.

The biggest preconception is that the priesthood is a paid, full-time profession. In our church world, that is true for only a very tiny minority of clergy. In my opinion, that is fine; it’s not a failing, since that is how Church works for most of us. Some folks in our movement work in “priest-adjacent” jobs that contain some ministerial work, like therapists, social workers, and “generic” chaplains who are not tied to a particular tradition. Those folks need to very carefully navigate their multiple roles. There’s the very small number of people who are actually paid to be full-time priests, then there are people who work in those types of professions, and then there’s the rest of us who work in other professions. I, for instance, negotiate contracts for a hospital, which, on the surface, has nothing to do with my priesthood, although I hope that my spiritual commitments, formed in my priesthood, invisibly seep into the way I do my work and the way I deal with all the people involved.

If you want to be a full-time, paid professional clergy person, there are places to do that, but it is very rare to find such places in our churches. That model of ministry has certain advantages: If you’re paying a priest for all of his or her time, that person can be a lot more available and can travel and serve communities that may not have a resident priest.

I mentioned Steiner’s *Christengemeinschaft*: They have a full-time model, with priests who travel to multiple locations. Emma Heirman, a priest in Baltimore, travels to Nashville, Atlanta, and other affiliate locations. Emma is supported full-time by the communities she serves, so, if someone passes away, she can be there for the family and can

celebrate the funeral – which would be more difficult for people like me with a work schedule. If that’s your calling, and that’s the way that your parish works, bless you, and make good use of the advantages of that model. In my experience during the last 40 years, that’s a very rare person in the Independent movement.

To serve in a free way, which is much more common, has incredible advantages also. We can challenge people in a way that paid clergy can’t, since paid clergy potentially risk losing their livelihood, including their insurance and pension. The free priest has much less of a sword hanging over her head. Free priests are also found in unlikely places, amidst people who might never darken the door of a church and who might never go to see a priest. A lot of people aren’t headed to church anymore; they’re not going to go see the priest, and so, in a way, the Independent movement is sending the priests to the people! The free priest might be a nursing home worker, a lunch lady at an elementary school, a bus driver, a business consultant: Those are all real examples of friends of mine, people I know and love and work with. I love that one of my friends is both a priest and the elementary school lunch lady! Even though people don’t realize it, the priesthood has slipped into places where it is completely unexpected. A free priest is able to model the grace of Christ as freely given, with nothing expected in return. There’s no transaction, no *quid pro quo*. A free priest causes the community to focus on what’s really essential: worship, sacraments and preaching. Other activities, however good, may not be available since someone working at a full-time, secular job, not unlike the Apostle Paul who made tents (Acts 18:3), only has so much time. This focus can be a good thing: Churches can get very distracted by all the programs and activities, which may be great, but have little to do with the core identity of the Church. Wonderful social and educational programs can be done by people who are not part of the Church. Free priests cause us to focus on the Church’s unique mission, which really is the Word and the Sacraments. The model of an unpaid clergy also provides the opportunity for laypeople to step up to change light bulbs, fix windows, and check on sick members.

You might wonder: Will we always have only small communities? It’s likely that Independent communities, as a whole, will always tend toward the small. It just seems to be the way that we are – but it doesn’t necessarily have to be that way. My dear friend, Bishop Jewell Granberry, is the pastor of a parish in North Nashville, which has a weekly attendance of over 100, as well as many activities, like bible study groups, a weekly radio program, and the like. Bishop Jewell is retired from her secular job as a nursing home administrator, and she has 12 to

15 ordained ministers – deacons and priests – most of whom work in the world in a variety of ways, from office administrator to FedEx driver. That many clergy are able to care for a community of 100 to 175 people. There are enough people to do everything that needs to get done.

Fifteen years later, the biggest hole that I see in my dissertation, which became *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement*, is that I did not really know about the Black Spiritual Movement, which is the title of Hans Baer’s work on the African-American “spiritual churches.” Bishop Jewell’s church is duly affiliated with an Old Catholic jurisdiction and with an African-American spiritual movement jurisdiction, which, if not part of the Independent Sacramental Movement, might be considered a sort of African-American “twin sister” of the ISM. This movement is likely invisible to those of us who are of White, European heritage, and it has been a joy to get to know those groups and those people: It’s like discovering a whole world of cousins you didn’t know you had! I regret that *The Many Paths* doesn’t address this, and, if I could rewrite the book in some alternate universe, the African-American Spiritual Movement would be a huge part of it. There’s a world of great interest in churches of that are similar to that of Bishop Jewell.

To give another example, some friends in North Carolina have a small church, with five to ten deacons and priests. They may all be at the church on any given Sunday, but only one or two will vest and serve at the altar. With that many clergy, someone is always available to do what is needed, whether that’s preaching on Sunday, anointing someone in the hospital, or whatever the case might be. That’s actually how I found that church in North Carolina: A retired friend was in the hospital in Asheville, and a volunteer priest from that church appeared and helped her out with what she needed.

In place of one or two professional ministers, if a parish is willing and able to train and ordain a larger number of the membership – which requires having people show up who want to be members and who want to take this on – this can make a lot of things possible.

The priesthood is first and foremost a spiritual reality that can be lived in many ways in the world. Whether public or not, the priest sacrifices something of the personal in order to share in the mediatory activity of Jesus Christ. Melody’s husband, John Rawson, likes to say that our personality is like John the Baptist: We must become less, so that Christ can become more in us (Jn. 3:30). We’re like the woman with the issue of blood, reaching for the hem of Christ’s garment, that his healing, life-giving power may flow into us and through us to others (Mk. 5:25-34; Mt. 9:20-22; Lk. 8:43-48). Our job is not to draw attention to ourselves in

any way. It's exactly the opposite, which is the point of the vestments that veil or obscure our personality behind the work that we have been given to do, the work of trying to be an agent of Christ's presence to others.

We have handed ourselves over for God to use. In his general guidelines for priests, one of our spiritual ancestors, Father Paul Blighton, says that, "Once ordained, we no longer have a right to a life of our own." That may sound really extreme, but I submit to you that it is simply true—at least in my experience. I'm reminded of Bishop Catherine Adams, now long retired, who was my first bishop. When I was ordained a priest in 1996, she told me at my ordination mass that being a priest is like being tossed out onto a rough sea: We can go with the waves and see where they take us, or we can fight the waves and drown. It's our choice. In my experience, that is true—for myself and those for whom I've had the privilege of working with over the years.

A priest may be paid or unpaid. A priest may serve a large congregation in a very public way, or a priest may be essentially hidden away, in quiet intercession. Likewise, a priest may have academic degrees and traditional seminary training, or a priest may be trained through mentorship. All the degrees in the world do not make a priest. Degrees, training programs, certificates and the like are useful if they give a priest tools for their unfolding vocation. If a priest plans to do a lot of teaching and must be conversant in theology, or plans to do scriptural study through an academic frame, training in those areas will be needed. If a priest is involved in counseling, appropriate training is very much needed in that case. Degrees, whether conventional or from the more doubtful programs that some of us have bumped into in our movement, too often become ego games or ways of showing that we're just as good as others because we, too, have an "M.Div." I hate to break it to you: An M.Div. or M.A. from a seminary never proved that anyone had a spiritual life or was a worthy candidate for ordination! What such degrees more reliably demonstrate is that you have a mountain of student debt—which is a potential disaster for an Independent priest, who is unlikely to be compensated in any significant way. It's one thing to require an academic degree when one's denomination will be paying a full-time salary and may even have a program to help address seminary debt. When that is not the case, it seems foolish and even cruel to push people in that direction.

Regardless of one's academic background, almost all of the real skills of a priest are learned through mentorship, by being alongside experienced priests—even when we're just "along for the ride" and are

not being formally instructed. No one learns to celebrate the liturgy well by reading a book or taking a class. You learn by standing at the altar with someone who has gone this way before you. The same is true of navigating weddings, preparing to preach, and visiting the sick. Even when we've had the benefit of classes, we learn by doing—and most often by doing with others and letting it “rub off” on us.

Clergy with different types of academic training may have certain specialized skill sets, which are great, but they're not thereby better clergy, better deacons or priests, than those who have been prepared through personal mentorship. There will always be some Independent clergy who go the path of academic preparation, because they came to us from a mainstream church which required it, because they're choosing a paid profession like teaching, for which it's necessary, or because it's just what they want to do. But for most of our clergy, most of the time, such programs are simply not realistic. We have to rely on mentorship and on educational opportunities that we create for ourselves.

The need for mentors and for homemade, in-house training is another reason for building strong relationships with other local Indy churches and with other local mainstream churches, where clergy have different skills. Clergy are usually more than happy to help with training a new deacon or priest, as they know the same help will be extended when they have a candidate in the future. One person may be particularly gifted at pastoral visitation. Another knows how to run a really good Bible study. Another can show you how to pray with people. Recently, our local African Orthodox Church congregation ordained a priest who received a lot of training from the other clergy inside the AOC here in Nashville, and I spent a lot of time working with him on liturgy and church history. We also have an Orthodox-Catholic Church of America seminarian who is attending our parish, and he's doing plenty of things with us. We work together to provide for individual needs, and it seems the ideal is for a candidate to spend time with a number of different clergy, learning and building relationships, and letting the priesthood “rub off” on them. One of the things that I intend to do is to take that OCCA seminarian around, so that he can meet Bishop Jewell, and the people at St. Teresa's on Trinity Lane, and the Christian Community that Reverend Emma visits from Baltimore, to introduce him to the broader community within our movement, to broaden his model of priesthood, and to help him see this movement differently.

Any attempt to shove communities of the Independent movement into some kind of denominational structure or large umbrella is a mistake. Such attempts always fail, but it's wonderful and highly

advisable to create loose networks of friendship and support, where clergy training is at the top of the list.

Look at the past two to six years: It's a simple statement of fact to say that we live in strange and troubled times. We live in an era when traditional mainstream churches are often struggling to find a way forward while the floor is collapsing underneath them. Denominations are closing congregations and selling buildings to stay afloat. In Tennessee, where I live, the average new professional mainstream minister last five years before they decide to quit and sell cars or real estate. I went to school with a lot of Methodist, Presbyterian and Disciples of Christ ministers for whom this is true. A good friend in a neighborhood church just laid down the ministry and is now a football coach at the local high school.

As a result, denominations are increasingly unwilling to pay for the seminary studies of clergy who may not last, and candidates are reluctant to undertake student debt with an uncertain career in front of them. Perhaps these strange times are *our* time. If we don't try to emulate the mainstream, we can own and appreciate the unique vocation given to our small communities that lack money or property, that possess loose networks instead of denominational structures, that have flexible locations and an unpaid clergy with no time or money to do anything other than what's really most important. By focusing on training through mentorship, we focus on what's really essential in the Church's mission, and we do our best to embody the work of Christ in our sometimes unconventional locations. In doing so, we not only serve our own communities well, but we provide a demonstration plot for the larger Church, showing what the Spirit can multiply out of our meager offerings, providing bread in the wilderness!

Reflections on  
**“Farther Along Our Many Paths”**  
**A Keynote by Bishop John Plummer**

Mathias: Bishop Plummer, you are an absolute saint! It was three weeks ago tomorrow that Father Marek and I first discussed ideas for this summer school, and as soon as I got back to the United States two weeks ago, you were the first person I called. We appreciate you pulling together this opening keynote on such short notice. We had been looking forward to having you for a long time: After our first interjurisdictional gathering in 2019, we reached out to you, and you were willing to join us for our next event in St. Louis in the fall of 2020, which was scuttled by COVID – so we still look forward to meeting you in the flesh!

Plummer: If anybody wants to meet in the flesh, come to Nashville! We meet at 9:30 every Sunday morning at 355 Tusculum Road, and you’re always welcomed at St. Basil’s – and if you let me know you’re coming, I may hit you up to be the guest preacher!

Božek: Thank you for a wonderful presentation. I have come to agree with many of your points, and I’m still on the edge with others. The one that makes me most uneasy is your statement on the fragmented state of our movement in English-speaking countries. You suggested that perhaps God is calling us to be independent. Perhaps I didn’t hear you correctly.

Plummer: You heard me correctly. In almost 40 years of being around these churches, all attempts that I’ve seen at some kind of unification into a denominational-type structure or federation that would represent everybody – or some segment of “everybody” – has exploded. Such efforts fail over and over again. The me of 1992 or 1993 would have been enthusiastic about the Federation of Independent Catholic and Orthodox Bishops (FICOB), which was one such effort at the time. Meri Spruit was a driving force behind that. At work, my boss says that I’m not only a glass-half-empty sort of person, but that I’m also sometimes the glass-broken-on-the-floor guy. All efforts have failed. There are great opportunities for working together in constructive ways, but

looser efforts succeed much better over time, in my experience. The type of people who are drawn into our communities and into our clergy are often eccentric and independent, and there's a reason why they're not calling the ELCA or the Episcopal Church. I have come to discern that this way of being Church is a way of being Church that works well for folks like that. There are some large inclusive sacramental denominations, but instead of saying, "Let's get our act together and do something," perhaps we might acknowledge that our broken-up world may be a wave of the Spirit, providing a church home for those who are constituted in this way. That's where I come down at this point in my life, but I look back on what I wrote 15 years ago and say "Oh, my God," so I could think very differently 15 years from now. Personally, I'm very interested in having lots and lots of friends, and the accountability that comes with that, but I'm very not interested in denominational efforts.

Božek: I understand that you are speaking from experience, and that your experience has been ghastly...

Plummer: I don't think it's ghastly!

Božek: As you correctly point out, previous attempts of bringing some kind of cohesive, unified vision amid diversity have failed. My only problem is therefore concluding that this must be what God calls us to be.

Plummer: I don't think it "must be," but, in my own discernment, it is. There may be some who feel called to put together something. Great! I see such good in the larger Independent parishes around Nashville—like St. Basil's, Jewell's parish, and St. Teresa: There's so much good and so much real life in Christ that happens in these places as a result of the fact that they are the way that they are. Rather than try to prescribe for everybody, let's acknowledge that the independent and even quite eccentric ways of many of our communities serve the people who are in them. The prior pastor at St. Basil's briefly entertained a fantasy of potentially linking up with canonical Orthodoxy, and even without women's ordination or gay issues, the people of St. Basil's said, "Absolutely not! We like our own, little way!" For my community and for many who are like us, our small,



fragmentary “tents in the wilderness” are serving us and are serving the people who are drawn to us.

Mathias: After you published your book in 2005, Bishop Plummer, you published the *addenda et corrigenda* in 2006, in which you mentioned Father Marek’s parish, which was just emerging. You brought a great amount of experience into your work, which has been a great resource for our movement, and yet, in your opening remarks today, you referred to *The Many Paths* as “outdated.” You spoke of this in an episode of “Sacramental Whine” podcast as well. If there were to be a 2.0 of *The Many Paths*, the next version...

Plummer: The 2.0 of *The Many Paths* is someone else’s job!

Mathias: For that “someone else,” give us some insight into the big “buckets” of what might be corrected and/or expanded in a future work.

Plummer: Looking back, there are two big “buckets” that immediately come to mind. One is the African-American spiritual church movement, which is really a “twin sister” or even “in the house” with us. There was a phase in our history when Ukrainian Independent bishops were consecrating bishops for these “Black spiritual churches,” so many of them possess the same heritage of apostolic succession as us. They were invisible to me when I wrote *The Many Paths*, and now they’re some of my best friends. There’s a huge world that could be explored there. I also know a lot more about what’s going on in other countries, primarily English-speaking countries. Since writing that book, I’ve spent more time in Australia and England, and I have more awareness of the movement and its people in different parts of the world. There’s a lot more that could be said there. This is a fast-moving thing, and the groups and categories that are addressed in the book have all moved, so *The Many Paths* might best be described as a snapshot of 2003. The story keeps going, and Father Marek’s parish and other groups that are perhaps more similar to a traditional Roman parish but with more inclusive commitments are something that has grown and become more apparent and more common in the intervening years. When I was at the recent OCCA retreat, I met a woman who is a bishop and pastor for a Womenpriests group outside of Albany, New York. She has

a very sizable parish that very much meets that description: In many ways, it's very similar to a typical parish of what my friend, Tim, likes to call "the Roman denomination," but with women clergy and an openness on other points as well. Someone could do a whole study on parishes that are more like that.

Mathias: I have only been in the movement for ten years, but, when I thumbed through your entire work again this morning, I was struck by the many names of people and communities that I've not been acquainted with during these ten years. We are definitely in a movement that is continually moving. In this movement, we certainly couldn't step into the same river twice!

Plummer: It is continually moving. In the book, I discussed the interface between the descendants of the Holy Order of MANS and the Independent movement, and Michael Maciel has become an important voice on community, writing a number of books that are read well beyond that little sector. He wasn't doing that in 2003, so the river keeps flowing!

Furr: I just really love your spiritual curiosity. You spoke of the failure of efforts at unification and of our "tents in the wilderness." It seems we're in a whole new paradigm, and the shift we're in is no less significant than when we realized that we weren't the center of the universe. As a social scientist, it would be really interesting to go back to the "Zoom calls" and "text messages" in Copernicus' day, to see how people were adjusting to the new worldview at that time. Our worldview is changing, and we're realizing and affirming that all life is sentient and that the universe is without limit. Maybe it's okay to have "tents in the wilderness" right now, since we can't move through such a significant shift in worldviews while holding on to concepts that worked for us in the old worldview.

Plummer: Flexibility makes that possible.

Furr: Our "tents in the wilderness" allow for exploration as we ask ourselves at what point in our formation, preaching and understanding as an inclusive community we might allow ourselves to be shifted from these old models that don't make sense anymore.

Plummer: I don't think that my community and I could thrive in a larger, more "set" structure, and I think that's true of a lot of people I know as well. Many of us are quite happy in our little "tents"!

Smith: It seems that we're going backwards in some ways in the Independent movement, with its blurring of paganism, Christianity and Gnosticism.

Plummer: I am not saying that's a good idea, but it is part of the landscape. The diversity can get to a point that we wonder what people are doing. We need to ask ourselves: Regardless of what others are doing in other places, how are we being most faithful to our own vocations?

Smith: I'm a Catholic puritan, a "stick in the mud," a real stickler for the Old Catholic tradition.

Plummer: I hear you. I'm "Mr. Nicene Creed" and "Mr. Traditional Liturgy." I celebrate something that looks a lot like the Tridentine rite, in English, with a few Byzantine add-ins. We will get much further by cultivating our own spiritual lives, by cultivating the positive, and by embodying the best that we can, than by worrying about and feeling judgmental about stranger elements down the street. The people who show up on my doorstep on Sunday don't want to hear about how wrong and misled the people down the street are. They want to know what we are doing!

Ellis: Much of what you've said is highly quotable. Your reflections on formation and what makes a good priest seem spot-on to me. Like you, I went to a mainstream divinity school in the early 1980s and got zero spiritual formation. Your comment that our calling from God is most often right where we find ourselves, "right under our noses," is incredibly poignant, too. It seems to me that there is something in the DNA of Independent Catholicism that speaks to the experience of Exodus. The Exodus story has been appropriated by countless oppressed peoples, in their retelling of it. In our living out the Good News—the gospel of God's radical love, hospitality and inclusion—we need to be mindful not to return to Egypt or to measure ourselves by its standards. Jesus came for liberation, to set us free, free to experience salvation, or, as Zechariah said, "free to worship

Him without fear, holy and righteous in His sight all the days of our life” (Lk. 1:73-75). If the locus of the Church has shifted from large, traditionally-conceived parish ministries, to ministries that touch people’s daily lives where they are— which is a deeply contextual ministry—what are your thoughts on the idea that there may be something deeply engrained in the DNA of Christianity that might be inimical to the idea of an institutional Church?

Plummer: I’m very on board with the imagery of Exodus. We might even argue among ourselves about how we have despoiled the “Egyptians” and taken with us into the desert what was theirs. Some look at such spoils and say, “Get rid of that!” Others grab onto it and say, “No, I have to keep it!” It’s a very helpful picture through which to see things, even if we may have different views on what we should take to the Promised Land, and what we should have left back at the Nile. We have theological work to do in the location in which we find ourselves. We are a part of the Church, and the Spirit is working in us, and the Body of Christ expresses itself in the world through us. We may think that our location—our time and place in culture and history—is accidental. Carefully discerned, it may also show us the movement of the hand of God. If we are the expression of Christ’s Body, and if the Spirit is breathing in us, then we must open our eyes and look hard, and ask ourselves: “Where in this do we see God moving? Where is the Spirit active? What can we learn from this?” And theological activity spins out from our location!

Brohl: Bishop John, forgive me for mentioning a few personal things about myself, which might help you to better understand my point of view about Roman Catholicism. I was born and raised Roman Catholic, and I raised my children in the Catholic faith. Now, none of them are associated with any organized religion, nor are my siblings, who were also raised Roman Catholic. In 2002, having been energized by Vatican II, I joined the Independent Catholic movement under Archbishop Robert Bowman of the United Catholic Church. I came to understand that Independent Catholics were very anti-Roman Catholic. That was a shock to me. I had imagined that Independent Catholicism would be a place for Roman Catholics like me, who saw lots of

problems in the Roman Church. Just because I take exception to various things in the Roman Church doesn't change the fact that, in my heart of hearts, I'm still a Roman Catholic. I believe this is true of other Roman Catholics who sit in the pews of their Roman Catholic parishes every weekend: They're concerned about their church—our church—so I wanted to create a place for them to go. In my experience within the Independent Catholic movement, many Independent communities reference catholicity in their name, and they are very much Roman Catholic in their liturgy and in their practice of the faith. I embarked on a ministry of organizing the Independent Roman Catholic Church. Based on what you said in your opening remarks about heritage and identity, what do you think about a person like me, in light of the limited options that we have?

Plummer: You're right: Unfortunately, there can be reactive anti-Roman Catholic sentiments in some parts of the Independent movement. Some people have had negative experiences with the Roman Church. I have not have any negative experiences of the Roman Catholic Church. For me, it's just another denomination "over there." I wish them all the best, I have many friends who work for them as priests and theologians, and I'm interested in what they're up to, but it's just another denomination—just like the United Methodist Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, or whatever else. For me, there's no emotional energy for the Roman Church; it's another body of Christians. Some people are more invested in their relationship with Rome. I think there are a lot of people who are "in your boat." Many people feel very culturally, theologically and liturgically aligned with the church life that they've had in Roman Catholic communities. Once you're "outside the box," you're breaking Roman Catholic canon law by partaking of the sacraments of the Independent movement, with priests who, according to Roman Catholic canon law, have excommunicated themselves from the Roman Catholic Church by virtue of their ordination. I've seen too many people who have lived in a temporary fantasy: They think, "We're going to do this, and then Rome is going to notice us. Then Rome will care!" Baloney! Rome does not care about us, and Rome isn't going to care about us. We are so far off their radar! At our recent

OCCA retreat, a member of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests told us that she has advocated for removing the word “Roman” from their name as a recognition that they’re on their own, that they’re doing their thing, and that they know that the Roman Catholic Church is not going to be changed by anything that Roman Catholic Womenpriests do. An old priest in the Independent movement once said, “When you find a church, you may not agree with everything, and you may even fuss about some things, but when attend the liturgy, you have to be able to pray in peace. If you’re there, praying with a knot in your stomach, you need to find somewhere else to be!” That’s the challenge for folks who are very tightly tied to their prior Roman Catholic or canonical Orthodox identity, but who find themselves outside. They need to come to a place of being able to pray in peace in the Independent movement and to feel that this is their place, that this is their home, and that they’re not just visiting or angrily protesting. Such people could be a lot happier if they could say, “I’m at peace with the fact that my community is outside those structures that didn’t love us, that we are self-governing, and that we are “doing our own thing.”

Brohl: I’ve just heard too many people close to me—family, associates, acquaintances and people I’ve ministered to during the past 20 years in this movement—who say, “If only the Roman Catholic Church wouldn’t yell and scream about LGBTQ folks, and would love them like Jesus would!” “If only they would ordain women!” “If only the pope wouldn’t make decisions for every Roman Catholic on the planet!” “If only [this],” or “if only [that].” I would like those folks to know that it’s okay for them to have those differences with the Roman Church and still claim Roman Catholicism to the extent that they feel comfortable with it.

Plummer: Then you have difficult language issues: If you use “Roman Catholic” in your name — and I’m not saying, “don’t” — that’s going to be heard one way. So, we have to be very careful.

Brohl: Do you feel that putting “Independent” in front of “Roman Catholic” doesn’t do the trick?

Plummer: It's going to be a complicated conversation, and I would worry about whether people are really establishing an identity in your community, as opposed to always feeling, "I'm just camped out here, but the minute that Rome changes, I'm gone!" It's hard to build a church community on that basis, as a protest community that says, "We really want to be over there, but we're going to be over here because they won't let us in!" Your ministry is "right under your nose": You have to find your way with the folks with whom you're traveling.

Kemp: I've been a fan [of yours] for a really long time. I really appreciate your work, and we've used your book, *The Many Paths*, in our seminary, to try to describe Independent Catholicism to people. I remember FICOB from back in the day, since I was with Meri during that time of transition after Herman had died. Then Harvey Beagle appeared on the scene with some knowledge of the internet and the ability to put together directories. That was the first time that I saw a directory of Independent Catholics.

Plummer: There were some earlier directories, of purple, mimeographed sheets that were stapled together – and some six people had a copy!

Kemp: I've been around for a while, and I've been involved in a lot of battles within the Independent movement. I have a recollection of FICOB having disintegrated as a result of internal problems within the Church of Antioch, because of Harvey and Mary and other sorts of things. I'm wondering if you have any recollection of what happened with FICOB, and why it disintegrated.

Plummer: We're looking way back in time, so my memory may not be accurate, but my general impression of those times was that Harvey Beagle was quite good with the internet in an age when none of us knew what websites were, and that there was an effort on the part of some people to exercise a kind of centralized authority that was not welcomed by some people. You were probably closer to the action, to know whether that was really coming from Meri or from Harvey, but claims were made that Meri Louise Spruit of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch was the matriarch of the West, the holder of jurisdictional primacy. It seemed that FICOB

positioned itself as central and authoritative in a way that none of the other cooperators were. There were many things afoot – and Independents fight with each other. Tim Cravens once said that the three great festivals of the Independent Church year are Christmas, Easter and the annual schism. There were doubtless many factors afoot that I have forgotten, but that was generally the core issue that set off the dynamite.

Furr: Have you done any studies around how different populations perceive the problems of Independent Catholicism versus Roman Catholicism versus whatever, like women’s perspectives versus men’s perspectives, people of color versus Caucasian, straight versus LGBT, etc.? I’m not bashing White males, but, if the majority of clergy are White males, we have to ask: Is that voice heard more loudly than other voices in the movement? And how does that flavor our connection, or lack thereof, with Rome?

Plummer: I haven’t done the type of social science study that you’re describing, but I think it would be very worthy and valuable work. You might better direct that question to Julie Byrne, when she speaks with you next week. You might also check out Kathleen Kautzer’s work, *The Underground Church: Non-violent Resistance to the Vatican Empire*, which speaks of protest groups that have spun off from Roman Catholicism and do their own thing. The larger social dynamics of different groups and genders that we live inside of and try to make sense of are all active in our movement in ways that are sometimes not helpful or good. I use the example of the African-American spiritual churches, that were previously completely invisible to me; people from the Unity Fellowship Church Movement and the Metropolitan Spiritual Churches of Christ similarly had no idea that there were all these White people doing this. We were separated by race. The same thing happens with language groups and groups that are primarily gay or that are heavily focused on women’s issues. For people who just bumped into us for the first time, all these differences make the Independent movement confusing and difficult to figure out!



Furr: The perspective of men in the Church will have a different depth than the perspective of women. Straight perspectives will be different from LGBT perspectives. There seems an imbalance in how we express those perceptions, simply due to the numbers.

Plummer: It's super interesting to listen to these different perspectives. I was recently with the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, and I remember when the OCCA was almost exclusively White, gay men, so, at their recent gathering in Lewiston, I thought, "Where did all these straight people come from?" That has changed the dynamic of the group. The Metropolitan Spiritual Churches of Christ, the African-American denomination of my friend Jewell, started out as a heavily gay, male, Black group—and the first time they elected a heterosexual as the presiding archbishop, it nearly caused a schism. It's been lovely to be with you all, and these conversations are so valuable. I'm happy to continue the conversation!

## What We Might Learn from Utrecht: European Old Catholicism & U.S. Inclusive Catholicism

Mathias: Our conversation this evening focuses on Ultrajectine theology. I often refer to the city of Utrecht, in the Netherlands, as the “Birthplace of Independent Catholicism.” We might say that the first “Independent Catholic” bishop—though they wouldn’t have used that term of themselves—was consecrated there in 1724 by Roman Catholic bishop Dominique-Marie Varlet. I anticipated celebrating the 300th anniversary of Independent Catholicism in 2024—until seeing in Haarlem nearly three weeks ago a banner for a tercentennial celebration by the Dutch Church that read “1723-2023.” I asked the pastor of the Old Catholic church in Haarlem what occurred in 1723. It was the archepiscopal election of Cornelius van Steenoven by the cathedral chapter of Utrecht! For nearly 300 years now, we’ve had this tradition of Catholic churches ordaining and consecrating people to serve God’s people outside the structures and strictures of the Roman papacy! This Ultrajectine tradition, this tradition that flows from Utrecht, is part of our spiritual heritage, and tonight we have a panel of past participants in the Utrecht Summer School, in the summer courses that Utrecht University offers: its course on “Old Catholic Theology in its Ecumenical Context,” which it has offered since 2013, and its course on “The Early Church as Ideal: Old Catholic Theology beyond the Basics,” which it offered through virtual means in 2021 and in-person in 2022. Let’s meet our panelists: Tell us who you are, tell us about your ministry to God’s people, and tell us how you first came to Inclusive or Independent Catholicism!

Nachefski: My name is Deacon Donna Nachefski, and I am with St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri. I was ordained as a permanent deacon for St. Stanislaus in March 2018. I also have a secular job in management, so I try to blend both jobs together. I came to St. Stanislaus because my husband was part of the Roman Church. I was born and raised Lutheran, but my husband was a Polish Catholic, and the bishop of our city started closing churches, and we were a little rebellious, and we went to the Polish church that the

bishop was after, so that's how I began in Independent Catholicism.

L. Walker: I am Bishop Leonard Walker. I was ordained 48 years ago, in 1974, in the Roman Catholic Church, as a member of the Society of the Divine Savior, the Salvatorians. I officially took a leave from the Roman Church in 2005, when I decided to finally have some integrity as a priest in a gay relationship, and I left Rome and came to Kingman, Arizona. For two years, I did nothing but mourn the church that I loved and the community that I had known since I was 14. During that period of mourning, I was invited back into ministry by now-deceased Bishop Gene and Bishop Michael. As a Roman Catholic pastor in a place with an Independent parish, I was very critical of the movement, and I mocked the idea of being an "Independent Catholic." It was difficult to come to accept something that I had so dismissed in my previous ministry, but I finally accepted the invitation to start saying mass again, and the rest is history.

Vanni: Everyone calls me Trish. I'm a presbyter in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion and the pastoral director of the first ECC church in Minnesota. We're small, but mighty. I grew up in a Roman Catholic community in northern New Jersey, went to a Jesuit university, and found my way back to a meaningful relationship with my faith after some life events precipitated a really close look. I was the executive director of two national nonprofit efforts to serve people in ministry in the United States. I was the parish market publisher for Liturgical Press, and I consulted for LTP and 23rd Publications before I took this leap. I have a Ph.D. in Ecclesiology and Organizational Leadership, with a sort of sidebar on liturgical theology.

Bożek: I'm Marek Bożek. Since our parish is trilingual, most people call me "Father," some people call me "Padre," and Polish-speaking people call me "Ksiądz." I am an "accidental schismatic." I was ordained in the Roman Catholic Church in 2002, and I never planned on leaving the Roman Church. It just happened that I got excommunicated, together with St. Stanislaus Parish, in 2005. After being excommunicated, I felt isolated and lonely, so I reached out to the Polish Catholic Church in Poland, which is a member church of the

Union of Utrecht. I found a great mentor in its presiding bishop, Wiktor Wysoczański, who has been my sounding board ever since. 2006. He was the one who arranged my first trip to Utrecht, to meet then-Archbishop Joris Vercaemmen in 2008, and the rest is history. In 2013, Bishop Francis Krebs and a few others joined me for the first-ever summer school in Utrecht, and it was a wonderful experience. We learned a lot, and I have returned three times since then.

Carter: I am Father Scott Carter of the Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative Conscience in Ashland, Oregon, a ministry of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch. I am Antioch's ecumenical and interreligious affairs officer. I was raised Roman Catholic. When I was in college, I studied psychology and ended up with a bachelor's degree in English, all the while sneaking in courses on Zen Buddhism, Taoism and world religions. After many years, I discovered there was an entire Independent Catholic movement that retained all the things that I loved about what I grew up with, and really dealt well with the areas with which I had problems with the Roman Church. I discovered that they had a seminary that offered courses for individual spiritual development, so I thought, "Great! I can write papers again, and I can work on my own spiritual development. This will be wonderful!" I didn't expect that I would perceive a vocation, but that's what happened, and I credit Sophia Divinity School and the folks at Antioch for that.

Mathias: I am Father Jayme Mathias, pastor of Holy Family Catholic Church, Austin's only inclusive Catholic community, as we like to say. I often say that I come from the cornfields of Ohio, to the corn tortillas of Texas. For many years, I was a Conventual Franciscan Friar, a "Black Franciscan." I studied in St. Louis and Washington, D.C. I was a priest for more than ten years, until a bishop appointed by Papa Ratzinger and I publicly got on opposite sides of two issues, immigration and women's reproductive health. As a result, I stepped outside the Roman Catholic Church, founded Holy Family ten years ago this year, and am loving life. Much of what we're doing interjurisdictionally these days springs from the experience that many of us had in the Utrecht summer school. I was very inspired by my visit there in 2019, and I came back with a desire to really build bridges and

begin to build some unity within this movement, particularly upon hearing the assessment of then-Archbishop Vercammen that the Independent Catholic movement in the U.S. is characterized by disunity.

Our first question for panelists is: How did you first learn about the Utrecht summer school, and why did you decide to attend? Why did you invest in going to Utrecht. Also, give us some context: When did you attend Week 1 and/or Week 2 of the Utrecht summer school. I'll jump in first. I learned about it through Facebook. Fortunately, Holy Family was very generous in supporting my ability to escape to Utrecht. I attended Week 1 in 2019 and Week 2 this year.

L. Walker: I attended Week 1 with Jayme in Utrecht. I was the bishop of The National Catholic Church of North America at the time and had the resources to support me, so that's how I got there.

Carter: COVID-19 killed my in-person visit to Utrecht in 2020. The Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch asked me to go, and I was excited to do so. My wife was an exchange student in the Netherlands when she was young, and she speaks some Dutch, so I was really looking forward to the trip. I didn't get to make it in-person, but I did attend both weeks virtually in 2021, and it was a really good experience.

Nachefski: I attended Week 1 in 2015. I was in formation for the diaconate, and Father Marek suggested that it would be a good experience for me. He went with me, so I felt very comfortable being there. It was a very enlightening experience, and I really enjoyed learning from two of my classmates about the Philippine Independent Church—which I had never heard of before. What I learned helped bring everything together for me. I was supposed to return for Week 2 in 2020, but then the pandemic hit. I was going to try the next year, but that didn't happen. This year, I had some medical expenses I had to pay for, so I couldn't make the trip—and I'm sorry I missed it.

Vanni: At the urging of our presiding bishop, who was super-enthusiastic about the experience, I went some two weeks after my ordination in 2018.

Božek: I went for the first time in 2013, and, since I didn't pass the first time, I repeated the class with Deacon Donna in 2015! Three weeks ago, I attended Week 2 with Father Jayme. Each time, I learned something new. It really is a very educational experience, and it's an amazing opportunity to network and get to know people with different church experiences, sometimes very different from our experience, soaked in this North Americans "stew." We may not realize that the Church is doing very well and very differently in different parts of the world.

Mathias: For those who may not know, Father Marek was joking: He did not fail the course in Utrecht, but instead chose to go back—which really says something about the program and about his desire to learn more about this movement! Because of the pandemic, we recognize that not all of us have traveled to Utrecht, but, for those of us who have, part of the Utrecht summer school experience is being present and experiencing life in the Netherlands, in the context in which Independent Catholicism was born 300 years ago next year. For those who have visited Utrecht, what are some of the most memorable activities in which you engaged outside of the four hours of daily classroom instruction?

Božek: Avoiding bicycles! Bicycles are everywhere, on every corner and every street in the Netherlands. Here in the States, we're used to multiple car lanes and maybe a narrow bicycle lane. Reverse that image: The bike lanes are at least as wide as the car lanes in the downtowns of many Dutch cities. The bicycles rule the streets, and pedestrians have to be very careful. Another thing that I find fascinating about the Netherlands is they view culture and secularization as good things. This was confirmed in a lecture this year. We tend to think of secularization as a black cloud that comes and removes people from the Church. For many very good reasons, Dutch and other European theologians look at secularization as something beneficial—not only as something dangerous and scary.

Vanni: Two things stood out. One was the fairly peaceful Reformation that they had, and their "hidden churches" are absolutely fabulous and fascinating! There's a great museum in a former monastery, and sadly the Roman Catholic

cathedral is now a museum, and we're able to experience the history in a whole new, hands-on way. It's one thing to study the Reformation in the seminary; it's another to be in a country that lived through it. I found the posture of the faculty there to be incredibly welcoming. There was a great deal of camaraderie with the faculty, and there were many hours just sitting and having beers. Having just completed a Ph.D. a few years before, it felt like a very different dynamic than what I had experienced in the States. My faculty at the Graduate Theological Union was fabulous, but Utrecht offered a whole other level of collegiality that I found really refreshing, and I enjoyed the downtime conversations much more than the classroom conversations.

Nachefski: Having been raised a Missouri Synod Lutheran, the Reformation was important to me, but I had a slightly different take than Trish. I was really upset to see how the religious statues were defaced: The faces of all the stone carvings in one church were removed by reformers, and that really hit me, to think "This really happened here!" I had learned about the Reformation in school, but now I was seeing statues with their faces removed, and paintings that were scratched out. It was upsetting. The classes were great, and Father Peter-Ben Smit is wonderful. He's a very smart individual, and I could absolutely listen to him forever. I never told him that I was a Lutheran, but, by the third day of class, he asked me out of the blue: "You were a Missouri Synod Lutheran, weren't you?" I asked, "How do you know that?" And he replied, "They're more Roman Catholic than Roman Catholics!" He's a very smart man, and I just really enjoyed his class tremendously.

L. Walker: Marek stole my opening line about bicycles! My husband came with me to the Netherlands, and we stayed in the university housing. Being an older man, I had problems walking with my brace, but I was absolutely astounded by their public transportation system, their signage, and how on-time they were. It was amazing. Seeing so many international students together in the same room, from all over the world, gave me a real different sense of belonging to something real. As an Independent Catholic, I previously hung my head in shame, but being in that classroom with these great professors and all these international students

was quite something. I was very appreciative of the socials that were hosted by the school at the beginning and end of the experience—and how can you beat going out for beers along the canals? The museums were really enlightening, and I was impressed with the Old Catholic liturgy at St. Gertrude’s Cathedral. It was a joint service with a Protestant church, and I sat behind the Protestant ministers whose children’s choir sang during the mass. Despite what happened during the Reformation, with all the blood that was spilled, that close relationship between Protestants and Independent Catholics was impressive.

Mathias: Thank you, Bishop Leonard. It was a delight to be with you there in 2019. For those who aren’t familiar with the history of the persecution of the Catholic Church in the Low Countries, the “hidden churches,” of which our panelists have spoken, are really impressive. This year, Father Marek and I enjoyed dinner in a restaurant that was formerly a “hidden church”: It makes for an interesting experience when you’re having dinner in a place that’s decorated for Catholic liturgy! Utrecht is a city that is built on canals, and the canals are lined with businesses and restaurants of all sorts, so some of my fondest memories are tied to those canals: Sharing tall beers at restaurants and pubs along the canals with Leonard and his husband and all of our classmates, and even kayaking through the canals one evening!

Our next question for panelists is: Tell us about some of the people whom you met during the experience of the Utrecht summer school? Where did your classmates come from? What languages did they speak? How did you communicate? How did your interactions with other folks from throughout the movement and throughout the world enrich the experience?

Božek: Many of us have hundreds or thousands of Facebook friends whom we’ve never met, so it’s always great to put faces to online connections. I enjoyed listening to the spiritually-uplifting stories of different church experiences. In 2015, when I went there with the Deacon Donna, we met people from the Philippine Independent Church, like Father June, who is a chaplain to Filipino seafarers off the coast of the



Netherlands. This year, I met Father Bruce, an American who was ordained by the Church of England and now serves as a bi-ritual priest in Haarlem for the Church of England and the Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands. We always meet some very interesting people—like Thoma Lipartiani, a smart, impressive young man who serves a small but growing Episcopal congregation in Tbilisi, in the Republic of Georgia. He’s building an inclusive and truly Catholic community from the bottom-up in a very different environment from what we are used to in the West. I appreciate such wonderful new friends!

Nachefski: I was totally ecstatic to meet women priests from the Philippine Independent Church there. It was very exciting to talk with them and learn about their church. It was just absolutely wonderful. I also became really close friends with a woman from Bremen, Germany whose child had just come out to her as LGBTQ, and she needed to find a church that would accept her and her child. I was so impressed that she came to the summer school to learn about the Independent movement and to find a place where she and her child would be welcomed. It was a very enlightening experience!

L. Walker: I wish I had spent more time with those who were there from the Philippine Church. I’m now connected with them on Facebook—and it seems there were some Brazilians there, too.

Mathias: We had two Brazilians who were with us—and we struggled to communicate with them!

L. Walker: I didn’t have any personal conversations with them. I was impressed with one young man from the Netherlands who helped me with personal needs, since I was having trouble walking: He is a lay person in the Old Catholic Church, with no intention of being ordained, but he wanted to learn about his faith and deepen his experience of his own church. That’s also where I met you, Jayme, and I’m so grateful for all that you’ve done for our movement since then.

Mathias: It was at the Utrecht summer school in 2019 that I first learned about the Philippine Independent Church, and it was absolutely mind-blowing to hear from Father Franz Foerster and Bishop Antonio Nercua Ablon that we have an

Independent Catholic church in this world with over six million people! As Bishop Leonard suggested, we had a bishop and a priest from Brazil who spoke no English but were nonetheless participating in this English-language program. Truth be told, they were there to meet and get a photo with the Archbishop of Utrecht, but they provided us the fascinating challenge of communicating with them despite them not knowing English and us not knowing Portuguese. We met Thoma Lipartiani from the Republic of Georgia and Martin Kováč of Slovakia: Hearing their stories enriched my view of the universal Catholic Church.

Carter: The online experience of the summer school was different, but everyone seemed special. I scrambled to connect with as many people as possible, despite the many different time zones we were in. I thought: They should have been in bed hours ago, but they're staying up to interact and be social! The faculty and staff were wonderful as well, and they went more than the extra mile!

Mathias: Are we ready to jump into a theological discussion? The Utrecht summer school consists of a variety of experiences, including classroom lectures, and (outside of the pandemic) visits to sites in the city of Utrecht. Give us a summary of some of the most impactful two or three classes that you participated in, and some three or four key takeaways that you might share from each class.

Vanni: I'm less positive than you might like, Jayme. I found the classes very inconsistent in terms of quality and the level they were teaching to. It was frustrating, even if understandable due to the incredible spectrum of diversity in each cohort, particularly with respect to background on Old Catholicism. The historical classes were the most interesting, but I was not "wowed." To be honest, I didn't walk away with a whole new theological point of view.

Mathias: I appreciate your honesty, Reverend Trish. In Utrecht, I really came to understand that there is no "Old Catholic theology," so much as "an Old Catholic way of doing theology." I found that to be an interesting insight, particularly for those who might have similar questions about a possible "Independent Catholic theology." One fascinating class that we enjoyed during Week 2 was titled,

“Ancient Marriage in Search of Meaning.” It was led by Dr. Andreas Krebs of the Old Catholic faculty in Bonn, Germany. During Week 1, all of our instructors had come from the Netherlands, so I found it fascinating to have a voice from the Old Catholic Church in Germany during Week 2. That really enriched my understanding of the movement of which we’re part. Dr. Krebs essentially suggested that same-sex marriages are no more an innovation in Church and society than heterosexual marriages. One article that he shared referred to the Church as “queer,” as the marginalized Body of Christ—a concept that is as fluid as gender identity. The seminar framed various theological concepts from the LGBTQIA+ experience. Dr. Krebs poignantly noted the irony of the persecuted Church, itself a minority, persecuting sexual minorities, and we explored various rites of the Catholic Church throughout history for the blessing of same-sex unions. I was previously unaware of such rites, say, in the medieval Church, so I found this absolutely fascinating. I’d love to find the English translations of some of those rites of blessings for same-sex “friendships”!

L. Walker: I’ve seen some books on same-sex blessings, and John Boswell has written some great books on homosexuality and Christianity. It’s unfair to ask a person of my age and memory to point out any particular class from 2019, but I can tell you very distinctly what the classes did for me. They helped me to better understand Old Catholic history and ecclesiology. As a Roman Catholic priest, I was locked in a steel “bubble,” so I now have a whole new way of thinking about Catholicism—of being universal. I came away knowing that there is a legitimate theology and ecclesiology that could root us, as Independent Catholics, as deeply as I was rooted in Roman Catholicism—and the greatest difference lies in the universal versus the local church, and the ecclesiology of the local church bending toward synodality. It’s great to see how even the smallest communities, like Divine Savior with 10 or 12 people, can walk together with larger congregations, like Holy Family or St. Stanislaus, where lay people are active and have a voice and vote: That’s really critical to me. The structure of the Church in the Netherlands also struck me: They only have

three bishops, who are local bishops of a number of smaller communities, and they won't ordain any other bishops until one is needed. That's a challenge for us in the United States with our American form of Independent Catholicism. My former jurisdiction, for instance, called itself The—with a capital T—National Catholic Church of North America: There's another jurisdiction called the National Catholic Church of North America. Not only do we have jurisdictions with the same name; all jurisdictions cross states and regions, overlapping one another. That's a real challenge to the American Church, which is so different from the Church of the Netherlands. It challenges us to think about our concepts of universal Church, local church, and how bishops, priests, deacons and laity work together to bring Jesus Christ to the world. For me, that summarized the classes.

Nachefski: Like Bishop Leonard, I can't remember the specifics of classes, but I was intrigued by the history of the Old Catholic Church. Growing up, I didn't know there was anything other than the Catholic Church, and I didn't realize that meant "Roman." When my brother married my sister-in-law, she said, "I'm a Roman Catholic," and I asked, "Is that different from Catholic?" I had no idea that there were different "Catholics" out there. I thought all Catholics were Roman Catholics! The first Independent Catholic church that I heard of was Saints Clare and Francis in Webster Groves, Missouri. It was amazing to learn in Utrecht that the history of Independent Catholicism started long before that community. I was also surprised to hear that they didn't accept women at the beginning, and that women's ordination is a more recent issue.

Božek: I'm a canon lawyer by training, so I enjoyed the boring, put-you-to-sleep, legal lectures, but I'll speak on one theological class that we had on Thursday of Week 2. It was a class on the ordination of women, with Mattijs Ploeger of the Dutch seminary. Women were not ordained in the Union of Utrecht until 1996, but his theological construct was that ordination cannot be separated from baptism. Since we baptize with no regard to the gender or gender identity of the person, we cannot be inconsistent and suggest that another sacrament depends on the presence or lack of testicles. He advanced that it is heretical to ordain only biological males, and that

we should instead put the ball in the Vatican's court: They accuse Old Catholics of heresy because of their choice to ordain women. Until the 1990s, the Vatican merely considered the Union of Utrecht to be "schismatic": the Union of Utrecht did not proclaim any "heresies" until it ordained the first women to the priesthood! Now the Vatican refers to the Old Catholic Church not only as "schismatics," but as "heretics." In the eyes of the Vatican, the ordination of women is a big heresy! Mattijs Ploeger turned this on its head: The Roman Catholic Church is heretical for its denial of the validity of the baptism of people of all genders. If we baptize people of all genders, we have the same obligation to consequently ordain all qualified people, regardless of gender. That flipping of the theological argument—that Rome should defend its irrational position—was very attractive to me.

Carter: I, too, don't know that I would break the experience up into individual courses, but I really appreciated some of the theological and ecclesiological issues. The primary thing for me was the repeatedly-raised implications for us: their hermeneutic approach to the early Church, their hermeneutic approach to synodality, their attitude toward Independent Catholicism and the question of how close we might get to the Union of Utrecht. Those were the big takeaways for me that can't be chunked into an individual class.

Mathias: Speaking of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic of the early Church, Andreas Krebs shared another class in which he spoke of the Old Catholic search for God in a secular age. In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, which demonized culture and secularity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Old Catholic movement saw itself as a secular religious movement, not wanting to contribute to denominationalism or the fracturing of the Body of Christ. Dr. Krebs noted how the German Old Catholic embrace of modernity, secularity and human rights appealed to the early Church as a hermeneutic. This, though, leads to the "hermeneutical trap" of Old Catholicism, because we can't revive or resurrect the "old Church," the ancient Church. Instead, to justify our own our own ecclesial existence, we often place on a pedestal our own interpretations of the early Church, which correspond

to our interests. We resurrect that which corresponds to our own interests, to justify ourselves! The two examples that Dr. Krebs used for the Old Catholic Church's reaching back to the early Church were for (1) a theology for women's ordination, which, as Father Marek noted, only dates back to 1996 in the Union of Utrecht, and (2) a theology for same-sex partnerships and marriages, of how the Old Catholic Church reaches back to the ancient Church to justify its practice of blessing same sex unions.

Vanni: It's heartening to hear what you and Mark have described: I might reconsider Week 2! I always say that when we talk about "the early Church," we have to interrogate what exactly we're talking about and the lens through which we're looking. Are we looking through the lens of the post-Pentecost community? Are we using the lens of the first century, when the Church was beginning to organize? Are we looking through the lens of the Pauline communities that bubbled up? There are so many points of reference for the early Church that it gets fuzzy.

Božek: Speaking of hermeneutics, in our lecture on canon law, Adrian Snijders used the so-called Council of Jerusalem as the great hermeneutical model for how to approach controversial questions. In that episode, the early Church was not afraid to openly discuss and have very strong arguments on controversial issues. We all know the story of the Council of Jerusalem and the very real conflict between Peter's community and Paul's community—and how that conflict was openly discussed and resolved. Hermeneutically and canonically, this is a model for the way in which all Catholics might approach situations of division and conflict with an open mind, an appeal to the Holy Spirit, and a democratic/synodal process. It seems that model is consistently reapplied throughout the writings of the first and second centuries. We notice that various Catholic Reformation movements, like Gallicanism, Josephism and Jansenism, slowly pushed forward the "envelope," always using that synodal/democratic process that we see in the Acts of the Apostles.

Mathias: Are we ready to wade into some slightly controversial waters? In the past, then-Archbishop Joris Vercammen had

the custom of concluding Week 1 of the Utrecht summer school by sharing some strong words about Utrecht's perception of the phenomenon of Independent Catholicism in the U.S. My question for us here is: What did we take away from this experience regarding Utrecht's perception of us and our disunity here in the United States?

L. Walker: His remarks on our disunity seemed a little dismissive – as if the only “Independent Catholic” church in America is the Episcopal Church! I thought, “What the hell are we doing here? Why should we keep coming to see you?”

Mathias: Bishop Francis Krebs of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion shares of his experience in this month's issue of *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine. He writes, “Then-Archbishop of Utrecht Joris Vercammen referred to that attempt by the Old Catholics and Independent Catholics in the United States as ‘that failed experiment.’ What came of that exploration? Nothing...except frustration and disappointment. Archbishop Joris said the situation they found in the U.S. was ‘embarrassing.’”

L. Walker: Amen. What do we, as an American church, bring to the Body of Christ? As a result, I've been more reflective, looking for an ecclesiology for the American Independent Catholic Church that does not rely on Utrecht. Just as we don't rely on Rome for a stamp of approval, nor will I look to Utrecht for a stamp of approval. I'm thankful to them for the inspiration and guidance they've given us, but we have to define ourselves.

Vanni: I would like to underline everything that Bishop Leonard just said. There's a fixation in this movement on Utrecht. There's a “hangover” reality in our movement, of people looking for institutions and organizations to legitimize us. That is not how we're going to find our legitimacy – if we need it at all. Many of us feel that we inherently have the dignity of our Baptism and the fullness of Orders, and we can lead with integrity as Christian leaders. Focusing so much on Utrecht brackets hundreds of years of lived experience in our contextual, cultural setting that informs who we are in our Catholic self-expression, and I'm not willing to readily eject that. I remember writing to Peter-Ben Smit about wanting to get a perspective from Old

Catholicism on Vatican II. He wrote me back, essentially saying, “We have no perspective on that. No one has ever written on that. It’s not relevant to us.” Vatican II foundationally formed almost every major leader in this movement in the U.S. – so I don’t understand our fixation on Utrecht. As for the Episcopal Church: If I wanted to be Episcopalian, I would already have left and become an Episcopalian! I’d already have benefits and a retirement plan—except that the Episcopal Church USA is different than the Catholic Church in its expression. I remember talking to Reverend Margaret Rose, the officer for ecumenical relationships in the ECUSA, and the Episcopal Church’s attitude is exactly the same as Utrecht’s: “We are the ‘Old Catholics’ in the U.S. If you want to be an ‘Old Catholic,’ get in *our* boat!” I have said from the get-go: “For a variety of reasons, I am not interested in praying the Book of Common Prayer. Give us the right to our own rite!” That’ll never happen. I appreciate what Leonard is saying: We waste a lot of energy on this.

L. Walker: We are appreciative that they have given us a historical foundation, but we have to establish for ourselves who and what we are as a Church. That means acknowledging the great grace and the power of the Holy Spirit: how it moves within our nation, what it has done for us, as opposed to what it has done in the Philippines or Brazil. We don’t share the same situation, the same circumstances. What we have to offer the Body of Christ is a gift, and we ourselves need to define ourselves!

Mathias: There’s a deep human longing for connection with others. Here at Holy Family, we are not part of a jurisdiction, so, as you can imagine, we do possess a certain yearning to be part of something larger than our parish community. I’ll admit: There is something very attractive about the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches, and I found myself saying, “Wouldn’t it be something to be in union with a larger group like this!” Archbishop Joris’ words in 2019 made very clear to me that Utrecht, like the Roman Catholic Church, has no interest in communion with a disparate band of *clerici vagantes* here in the U.S. If we could form a national church, we might be able to knock at their door and have a conversation, but until the day in which we succeed in



uniting ourselves into an actual “national church,” which is the model of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches, we just don’t fit their ecclesiology.

Božek: I would sign my name under what Leonard and Trish said, except that we keep repeating, “My apostolic succession is valid! My sacraments are valid! According to *Dominus Iesus*, published by Ratzinger I am a valid church!” Every website and every bishop in our Independent Catholic movement makes those claims. On the one hand, we say, “We don’t need recognition or validation!” On the other hand, we quote documents from the Roman Church, and we claim lines of apostolic succession from Utrecht to validate ourselves and our churches. We can’t have it both ways. Either we “cut the cord” and say that we are our own church, and that we do not need apostolic succession via Utrecht or some other body. Or we don’t. It’s a very American thing to “have your cake, and eat it, too,” but we can’t do those two things simultaneously. Once we stop claiming apostolic succession via Utrecht, or once we stop lying to everybody that *Dominus Iesus* was about us, then we can stop pretending that we care. Until we stop pretending, we cannot say, “I don’t worry about what they say.” Our lines of apostolic succession and our websites claim otherwise. That was the most shocking part for Jayme and me at Utrecht this year: On two occasions, Mattijs Ploeger and Archbishop Wallet explicitly affirmed that they do not recognize our lines of apostolic succession, and they do not recognize our bishops as validly-consecrated Catholic bishops. To them, 99% of our movement in the U.S. is comprised of nice Christian ministers, but certainly not of validly-ordained Catholic deacons, presbyters or bishops – not because we are gay or women, but because we don’t have valid bishops. All those fabulous lines of “apostolic successions” on our websites are not valid for them. To them, we are nice Protestant ministers who pretend to be Catholic! We should either accept that, or work to fix it. We can’t have it both ways.

Mathias: What I’m understanding is that Utrecht may have a theology that underlies such assertions, such as *sine ecclesia nullus episcopus* (there is no bishop without a church). Can we speak to what theology might underlie that?

- L. Walker: Listen to how you framed that – and I’m not just saying this because I’m a bishop. There’s a more fundamental question: Is the charism of the bishop dependent on apostolic succession? That would be a more proper question, than the way you just framed it. Marek, I really appreciate that you underline the need to “cut the cord.” Write an article on that! Then, let’s address Jayme’s question: What would be a theological underpinning that might supplant apostolic succession?
- Mathias: Let’s add to this “soup” the comment of Archbishop Alan Kemp, who notes that there is also a dictum in the Church: “Where the bishop is, the Church is.” Such words could be interpreted by persons within our movement to suggest, “I am a bishop, someone laid hands on me, and so, where I am, the Church is!” Is there any corrective that the Church of Utrecht and/or others might offer to this?
- Bożek: Archbishop Alan quotes a very beautiful statement. In Latin, we say, *nulla ecclesia sine episcopus* (there is no Church without a bishop), but that Latin phrase contains a comma and continues *nullus episcopus sine ecclesia* (there is no bishop without a church). You cannot be a bishop without having a church, and Utrecht defines “church” as multiple parish communities that elect their bishop. Due to that two-edged sword, Utrecht believes that we do not have bishops – because we do not have churches! To them, we are just non-denominational ministers who are trying to do good things. We are engaged in a praiseworthy endeavor, but they do not see us as validly-ordained Catholic clergy unless we are ordained by the Episcopal Church, the Philippine Independent Church, the Polish National Catholic Church or the Roman Catholic Church. They only recognize the ordinations of those four groups in the U.S. as transmitting valid orders. In their eyes, none of our jurisdictions transmits valid Catholic orders and valid Catholic sacraments, with the exception of baptism, of course. They argue that one cannot be a bishop without having a valid church behind them. For them, there is no valid church outside of those four in the U.S.; hence, they do not recognize many of our bishops and priests.

L. Walker: What would be the building blocks for talking about a Church without apostolic succession?

Božek: I'm actually in the other camp: I believe that we should not "cut the umbilical cord" with our "mother." I think that there is a way for us to heal that lack of understanding, or the lack of sacramental validity for most of us. The Philippine Independent Church existed without lines of valid episcopal succession for over 40 years. For over 40 years, they ordained priests and consecrated bishops without valid bishops! Eventually, through their dialogue with the Episcopal Church, they gained Episcopal lines of apostolic succession. For decades, they existed as a church, as an ecclesial community, without valid sacraments in the eyes of Utrecht. That canonical lack later came to be healed by their subconditional consecration by Episcopal bishops. So, there is a precedent for that in the Philippine Independent Church. The Polish National Catholic Church existed for more than 10 years before it possessed a valid bishop, who was also consecrated in Utrecht. The PNCC and PIC are great examples of churches that existed for decades before having any bishop who was recognized by others. From the perspective of Utrecht, the path of achieving "valid" lines of apostolic succession and "valid" sacraments is not only hypothetical, but also possible.

Mathias: Father Mike Ellis, who was recently named Chancellor of the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, notes that St. Cyprian's view, that the bishop is tied to a local church, is the Orthodox view, whereas the view of St. Augustine won out in the West: that a bishop can exist without a physical diocese. The Roman Church, he notes, is filled with titular bishops of dioceses that don't physically exist. This creates a fascinating phenomenon!

Vanni: This is the first time I've heard anyone represent the folks of Utrecht as not recognizing our orders in the United States, so I'm hesitant to weigh in on this. Who said this?

Božek: Matthijs Ploeger and Archbishop Wallet said that. Jayme and I are translating a textbook on Old Catholic theology authored by Urs Küry, who was a bishop of the Old Catholic Church in Switzerland. When I first read it, I couldn't believe it. It seemed so outlandish! But then we heard it "from the

horse's mouth," so to speak. To my very direct question, both Professor Ploeger and Archbishop Wallet confirmed that this is their official position, just as it was 50 years ago.

Mathias: Perhaps that's a good segue to our next question: How have our perceptions of Utrecht changed as a result of this experience? Many people within our Independent movement hold the Church of Utrecht in high esteem. Like children who look for the approval of their parents, some might even be said to be looking to Utrecht for approval and/or validation. Like children, though, our perspectives often change over time. Now having experienced the Utrecht summer school, how has your perspective changed of the Union of Utrecht Old Catholic Churches and/or of the Dutch Old Catholic Church?

L. Walker: I certainly have deep respect for them. It's important that we have an understanding of them. I've spent a lot of time in Rome: Our "mother house" was right outside the gates of St. Peter's Basilica, and I got to appreciate all the treasures of Rome. I respect and honor Rome, and I want to respect and honor Utrecht. No longer being under Rome, I feel more grounded as a result of this experience. Now I'd like to see us, as Americans, come around to and define ourselves with pride and dignity, and not needing anybody's approval. The whole question of apostolic succession is a major issue, and all of us talk about it on our websites. How do we come to find and treasure our own tradition here?

Carter: I was very impressed with their willingness in print and in person to admit some things that would be challenging for more literalist traditions, like the reliance on a hermeneutic that suggests that interpretation is essential for moving forward. They are innovative as well as traditional. When it comes to their ideas of synodality and the early Church, I was impressed with their willingness to say, "This is not a logically-constructed and inescapable theological argument. It's a drawing-out of the Spirit, as we interpret it for our time." That's useful for us. It is important for us to understand that they want nothing to do with Independent Catholics in the United States. They don't believe in overlapping jurisdictions. Even if all of us joined a national church, they would still want that church to be subsumed

into the Episcopal Church. It is important that we understand where they're coming from, that they don't recognize us, and that they're not going to recognize us. The Episcopal Church is the only way they see us as coming into full communion with them. It certainly brings up questions for those of us who use "Old Catholic" in our names. We need to know that Utrecht has repeatedly and consistently expressed their overt irritation with Americans who call themselves "Old Catholic."

Mathias: Prior to the Utrecht summer school, the two phrases that I heard used of us were "Old Catholic" and "Independent Catholic." I'll be honest: In ten years of formation within the Roman Church, and in over ten years as a Roman Catholic priest, I never once heard of Old Catholicism. Shame on my formation for that: I never once heard of "Independent Catholicism"! I enjoy telling the story that, as the pastor of Austin's largest Spanish-speaking congregation at the time, there was a Mexican man who purported to be a Catholic priest and who was performing baptisms in a nearby garage. Not knowing anything about Independent Catholicism, I didn't know that he was an Independent Catholic; all I knew is that there was someone who was calling himself a Catholic priest and who was baptizing people. I sent my "spies" to that garage liturgy, and I went on Univisión to explain what a "real" baptism certificate looks like. Before I was part of y'all, I was Saul, the persecutor of Independent Catholics! So, as I was first discovering this movement and learning about it through websites, I found that many people in our movement self-identify as "Old Catholic" or they boast of documents that speak of the Roman Catholic Church's acceptance of the validity of Old Catholic sacraments – as if those documents applied to us, our orders, and our sacraments. The experience of the Utrecht summer school made it very clear that we are *not* Old Catholics and that, when the Roman Catholic Church talks about Old Catholics, the Roman Catholic Church is *not* talking about us. We are something else.

L. Walker: What, then, are some of the building blocks for you in defining who we are in this country?

Mathias: I have reconciled myself with our brother, Father Mike Lopez in New York, who says that we can't be looking for validity from people outside of us. Our validity has to come from our ministry. And though I daydream about how cool it would be to be in communion with Utrecht, I have reconciled myself with the idea that that's not going to happen anytime soon – and that's okay.

Vanni: I adore Mike, but, as Marek suggests, you can't have it both ways. You can't say that the recognition of others is not important on the one hand, while seeking the unity that he now has with the Episcopal Church USA on the other. Forgive me, but you can't say that it doesn't matter, while working to have it!

Mathias: If we were honest, many of us likely have a longing inside us for deeper connection with others.

Vanni: Then don't go to Utrecht, but get in the boat with your brothers and sisters here, and let's row together! We have to focus on what we're about here, particularly after learning of this detail of disdain for us.

Božek: It seems that Mike's argument is that we must begin with a valid ministry or service, and that the validation of others comes after, not before, that.

Vanni: I have a lot of respect for Mike, and I also have a real issue with people being ordained when they're not called by a community, so I'm really actually very much in alignment with that. I was simply noting that he is carving away, trying to figure out how to make that connection with the Episcopal Church.

Božek: I was glad to hear that Utrecht is not shy in admitting that they don't care about Vatican II. 300 years later, they clearly do not see themselves as an offshoot of Roman Catholicism anymore, and they don't have any interest in discussing Vatican II documents or the Roman Church's Synod on Synodality. They also do not claim to create new theology. As Jayme suggested, they say: "We don't have an Old Catholic theology." Such a thing does not exist. But they practice an Old Catholic hermeneutic, based on the theology of the early, undivided Church. They don't try to "reinvent

the wheel.” Instead, they try to apply the ancient “wheel” to a new environment and to new questions as they arise.

Mathias: Let’s lighten the conversation a bit. What, if anything, might we suggest for improving the experience of the Utrecht summer school for future generations of persons who travel to Utrecht?

Nachefski: It would be interesting for someone from the United States to share a presentation on what’s going on here, to see Utrecht’s reaction. It seems, for instance, that we are much more progressive on such issues as women’s ordination. I got the impression that the Church there would never have accepted women’s ordination had they not been in union with other churches that allow for women’s ordination. It was as if they felt they had to do it, even though they might not be fully on board with it, in order to maintain their unity with other groups.

Božek: The Old Catholic Church in Germany ordained two women in 1996 against the expressed will of the Archbishop of Utrecht. Utrecht did not want German Old Catholics to ordain women—but the German Old Catholic Church did anyway. In order to maintain bonds of interconnection between those two churches, the Church of Utrecht had to become more flexible. The Church of Utrecht is extremely traditional: They were using Latin into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they had celibacy until 1922! Utrecht is not the best example of European Old Catholicism, as many people think it is.

Carter: I want to comment on “having the cake and eating it, too”: Just because Utrecht doesn’t acknowledge the validity of our apostolic succession doesn’t mean that we should chuck the idea as having no benefit at all. Religions around the world derive emotional, psychological, spiritual and intellectual support from their connections to a historical lineage, theoretically going back into history and allowing, in our case, love and our founder’s teachings to be carried forward into the future. We know that, to some extent, it’s a fiction in terms of documenting the complete, literal details of any historical, hands-on, person-to-person transmission, from Jesus to anyone today, but for our brothers and sisters in the Independent Catholic movement or the Independent Sacramental Movement for whom that is important and who

find value in it—perhaps in part because the people they serve find value in it—I don’t think we have to chuck it out just because Utrecht says at a particular moment in time, “We don’t want to include you.”

Vanni: I’m just so grateful, Scott, that you went to the lovely construction of a narrative. I didn’t want to go there, but we do need to interrogate our concern over Utrecht’s perspective on our apostolic succession. I don’t know that our Presbyterian brothers and sisters are suffering or are afraid to do ministry because they don’t have apostolic succession, as approved of by Rome and/or Utrecht. I feel it’s very important to bring attention to the fact that traveling to Utrecht is a very privileged experience. It’s something that’s available to people with the means to buy a plane ticket, pay the tuition, and all of that. An emphasis on the importance of going to Utrecht has actually been a source of friction and ill will among some folks, so I really feel an obligation to them, to say it. Looking back, was it a fun week? Yes. Was it the best use of my funds? No. The Utrecht summer school gave me some wonderful insights, and I met some great people, but I made more meaningful, lasting and important connections at our first gathering in Austin. As John Plummer noted this morning, many clergy in our movement are “tentmakers,” with restrictions on their time, income and vacation hours. I’m glad I went, and I understand why Frank Krebs encouraged me to go, but I just did not find the value in it that would cause me to really promote it to other people. Forgive me, Peter-Ben and Mattijs, if you hear these words!

Mathias: Another lighter question: For the sake of those who might one day travel to Utrecht, what are some of the things that you wish you had known before traveling to Utrecht? Are there certain insights into life in the Netherlands and or in Utrecht that you might share with those who might consider one day traveling to Utrecht? I’ll share two examples: When I arrived in Utrecht, I quickly discovered that I couldn’t plug U.S. devices into the electrical outlets there! I wish I had known that I’d need to take or quickly find a European power adapter. I also neglected to do the readings until I touched down in Utrecht, so I found myself spending a lot of time reading in Utrecht, whereas, had I done the readings



in advance, I could have better enjoyed the city while I was there. What do you wish you had known that would have better prepared you for Utrecht?

- Božek: It is important to know that coffee shops are not about coffee: In the Netherlands, you go to a coffee shop to get high, not to get coffee!
- L. Walker: No doubt, it is a privilege to have the time and money to go, but, if you can, do it! I really can't tell you how important it was in turning me around, from the embarrassment I felt after leaving Roman captivity, to the freedom that I have come to know. It's amazing to think that I went from wanting Rome's validation – to not wanting the validation of Utrecht! Let's focus on the necessary foundation and basis for validating ourselves.
- Mathias: I enjoyed being in Utrecht, but I didn't necessarily enjoy being in a classroom in Utrecht – and so I've been thinking about pulling together a sort of pilgrimage, in which a group of us from the United States could go to various places and learn while we're on buses and trains and visiting museums and churches, rather than being in a classroom. I shared this idea with Father Peter-Ben Smit in 2019, and he replied, "No one has ever asked about pulling together a pilgrimage to Utrecht!" That idea remains in the back of my mind. It would be a lot of fun to pull together a group of people who have the time, the resources, and the interest to visit Utrecht – the birthplace of Independent Catholicism – and the Old Catholic ministries in surrounding cities!
- Vanni: I would rather see us pull together a pilgrimage to Turkey or the Holy Land. I'd rather see us walk in the footsteps of Paul and the early Church, than focus on the Netherlands. My final words would be to ask us to take to our prayer the question "Where does our authority derive?" I believe our authority derives from Jesus Christ, not from an institution. The earliest Church at the time of the council of Jerusalem was barely structured – but it possessed authority because it preached Christ crucified and risen!
- Carter: I totally, absolutely 100% agree that we are all part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and that our validity

derives from the love of God and our relationship with God, from which no one can separate us!

Nachefski: I was raised Lutheran and without a bishop, so apostolic succession is not a big issue for me. We just didn't have people telling us that we had to have apostolic succession. But I also understand that we serve a lot of "cradle Catholics," and it may be important to them. As their deacon, it's important that I understand how issues like this affect people, even when they don't matter to me personally.

Božek: It's good to have a center of gravity: The Orthodox have Constantinople, the Anglicans have Canterbury, and Roman Catholics have Rome. And it's good to know that there is such a center of gravity for Independent Catholicism in Utrecht, even if we are the "unwanted children." It's good for us to know where some of our thinking and theologizing – where some of our models – come from. I find my center of gravity in Utrecht, and, if I were to move back to Europe, I would probably find myself there more often!

## A Sesquicentennial Remembrance of the Old Catholic Congresses of 1871 & 1872

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

Today's topic is the sesquicentennial remembrance of the Old Catholic Congresses of 1871 and 1872 – and I begin with an apology: When Father Marek and I were in Haarlem, in the Netherlands, two and a half weeks ago, we had spoken with Father Robert Frede, a German priest who serves as pastor of the Old Catholic parish in Haarlem, and he had expressed a willingness to assist us with this presentation. Yesterday, we received a message from him, sharing his regrets that he needed to race to Germany to be with his mother. We pray today for Father Robert and his mother, and I beg your understanding that today's presentation is my meager attempt to cobble together in less than 24 hours a bit of my own knowledge of the events of 150 years ago.

Much of my understanding of the Old Catholic Congresses of 1871 to 1875 comes from the 1875 work, *The New Reformation*, by British historian John Bass Mullinger (1834-1917), who wrote under the pseudonym of Theodorus. Mullinger was the longtime librarian at St. John's College in Cambridge, and he is best known for his three-volume history of Cambridge University. What I love about Mullinger and his work, *The New Reformation*, is that he was writing about the Vatican Council and the reaction to that council as one who was recently living through this momentous experience for the Roman Catholic world and for Europe. He interacted with people who were reacting to the council as they received news of it. As a librarian, we also presume that he had access to a number of sources on the council and on those who were reacting to it.

Because this is the sesquicentennial of the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne, we'll focus on the events leading up to that event, and we'll leave subsequent Old Catholic Congresses, from 1873 onward, for our reflection during upcoming sesquicentennial celebrations!

One cannot speak of the Old Catholic Congresses without noting the context of papal proclamations regarding purported infallibility and the supposed universal jurisdiction of the pope. Regarding the former, the ancient Church believed that the Church was infallible. As the Body of Christ, the Church cannot err! The question naturally arises: What part or parts of the Church are infallible? That question takes us to the latter issue of jurisdiction.

There were two ancient theories regarding authority in the Church, both opposed to one another. Episcopalianism is the theory that all bishops share in apostolic succession, so all bishops are equals. In this model, God can speak to and through all bishops, and there is no thought of a single bishop—like the pope—being “over” other bishops. According to the model of episcopalianism, all bishops together exercise authority in the Church, rather than submitting to the pope. A contrasting view on authority in the Church was provided by papalism, which suggested that, in the same way that Jesus spoke to Peter, God speaks to the Church through Peter’s “successors,” who are supposedly the popes! We, of course, recognize the challenges with the historicity of such a claim, but, for the sake of this conversation, it’s important to understand that in papalism, all bishops are “beneath” the pope.

Let’s take a look at the wrestling over these issues that occurred within the context of the Church’s general councils. After the so-called “Council of Jerusalem” (Acts 15), seven councils of the Church were convened from the fourth century through the eighth century. Old Catholics—those who belong to the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches—recognize as binding the decisions of these seven councils of the undivided Church: Nicaea I (326), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (461), Constantinople II (563), Constantinople III (680) and Nicaea II (787). The Eastern churches, which continued to follow the “north star” of the faith after Rome’s deviation from it, and which subsequently excommunicated the Western Church in 1054, also recognize these councils.

Then, from the ninth century on, there are a number of general councils that are recognized as valid only by the Roman Catholic Church. That is, the Roman Church continued to convene councils that were not recognized by other branches of the Church: Constantinople IV (869), Lateran I (1123), Lateran II (1139), Lateran III (1179), Lateran IV (1216), Lyons I (1245), Lyons II (1274), Vienna (1311), Constance (1414-18), Basel (1431), Lateran V (1512-17), Trent (1546-63), Vatican I (1869-70) and Vatican II (1962-65).

Let’s back up: After those first seven councils of the undivided Church, a fascinating document was “discovered,” which we now know as the Donation of Constantine. This forged document alleged that Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire, ceded present-day Italy to the pope and released the pope from the oversight and leadership of Constantinople, the new center of the Roman Empire.

Another forged document that we now refer to as the Dorian or False Decretals was “discovered” in the ninth century and purported to

contain all papal decrees from previous centuries – another example of a compilation of lies, of invented decrees, that were cited as historical documents!

For the Western Church, these two documents formed the basis of canon law and church governance for centuries to come, and it wasn't until the Renaissance's rise in learning that 15<sup>th</sup>-century scholars definitively confirmed that these documents were false, so the Western Church held up forgeries to bolster its claims of certain papal powers, including supremacy over the Western Church!

We've heard Father Marek speak of his "Council of Constance principle." The 1415 Council of Constance was the Western Church's attempt to settle the debate of papalism versus episcopalism or conciliarism. At the time, the pope was interfering in the work of dioceses outside of Rome. This was contrary to the structure and practice of the early Church, in which every bishop was the "overseer" of his own community, "walking together" (*synodos*, in Greek) in communion with other bishops of other communities, who together settled matters of Church doctrine and governance. The 15<sup>th</sup>-century Roman (mis)understanding that the pope was over even the councils of the Church led to the corrective of the Council of Constance, where Jean Charlier de Gerson (1363-1439), the chancellor of the University of Paris, convincingly argued that the pope is not the head of the universal Church and could be deposed at any time without irreparable harm to the Church. Arguing for conciliar supremacy, he advanced that the councils of the Church are "the sole, supreme and indisputable voice of the Church." The Council of Constance brought an end to the Western Schism, where three men claimed to simultaneously be the pope, and mandated that a general council of the Church be convened every ten years.

After the Council of Constance, the very portly Otto Colonna was elected pope in 1417, and, now as Martin V, he immediately undid everything that the Council of Constance had enacted. He reenacted all of the decrees that had been undone by the Council of Constance, and his successor, Eugene IV, delayed the Council of Basel until 1431. The Council of Basel reaffirmed conciliar supremacy, the notion that the general councils of the Church are above any pope.

Mullinger notes that there followed "a deceptive calm" under Nicolas V and his successors. After the Council of Basel, it took 81 years for the next council to be convened, and the failure of the Church to signal its willingness to reform itself at the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512-1517 opened the door to the Reformation, which, some argue, would have

been entirely unnecessary had the Church addressed its need for internal reform.

Reformers indirectly raised the age-old question of infallibility, asserting that the scriptures alone (*sola scriptura*) contained doctrinal truth, and that the Church is human and fallible. They spoke of tradition as a human invention that developed over time. They declared their willingness to adhere to the first four councils of the Church, not because of any authority that convened those councils, but because the acts and decrees of those councils seemed, in their view, to be in harmony with the scriptures of the Church. Also notably, they deemed that the episcopal office—bishops!—are an “excrescence” that must be abolished in favor of the priesthood of all believers.

If Newton was correct, every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and, as a result of the beliefs that were advanced by reformers, the Roman Church felt the need to engage in what we now refer to as the Counter Reformation. Mullinger writes, “The widespread success of the Reformation was met by Rome with her traditional policy of haughty defiance.” The Roman Church conceded nothing, instead branding the protesting reformers of the Church as “Protestants”—a term that arose from the 1529 Diet of Speyer.

To effect this Counter Reformation, the Roman Church brought together its bishops at Trent, a city in northern Italy, for a series of conversations from 1545 to 1563. Martin Luther, who was in the eleventh hour of his life—he went to his heavenly reward in 1546—was quite vocal in his belief that the pope should neither preside over nor dictate to the council. Luther’s collaborator, Philip Melancthon, who went to his heavenly reward in 1560, before the end of the council, insisted that laity be included in the council. Of course, the Church does not listen to those whom it marginalizes!

What we find interesting about the Council of Trent is that, rather than focus on the internal reform of the Western Church, the council focused on suppressing these new “heresies” of the likes of Luther and Calvin, and all who esteemed them. According to the Council of Trent, all who appealed to scripture over tradition—*sola scriptura*, said the reformers—were anathema. Those who questioned the canonicity of the apocryphal books that Trent now included in the biblical canon were anathema. In retort to the reformers’ motto of *sola fide*, Trent declared that faith without love (or works) is impossible. It also defined the doctrine of the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. It advanced that the mass was instituted by Christ, and it alleged that masses for the dead stretched back to the apostolic times. The council’s proceedings included 430

anathemas—a Greek word meaning “cursed” or “denounced,” the equivalent of excommunication—to curse those who did not believe what the Roman bishops believed. Consider that for a moment: 430 anathemas!

As a result of Trent, we now had a much further divided Christendom, which comes down to the present day. After Trent, Rome increasingly veered toward absolute despotism and an unquestioning submission and allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church.

The first explicit mentions of papal infallibility are often traced to a Spanish Jesuit priest, Diego Laynez (1512-1565), who, during his short life, strongly advocated for papal infallibility. Interestingly, as Mullinger points out, with the rise to power of the Jesuits, the Church saw its ecumenical councils diminish. The Jesuits whispered in the popes’ ears, holding their attention during subsequent centuries. We’re all aware of the controversy that arose in the Low Countries concerning the Jesuits and their posthumous condemnation of the works of Cornelius Jansen, the Roman Catholic bishop of Ypres in Flanders. They labeled his 1614 work *Augustinus* as Calvinist, and the noted philosopher Blaise Pascal soon rallied to defend Calvinist ideas, including predestination. In 1653, Innocent X condemned “Jansenism” in his papal bull *Cum occasione*, igniting the Jesuit persecution of those labeled “Jansenists.” Mullinger writes that despotic Rome forced “the little ‘Old Catholic’ Church of Utrecht” to bow to its superior political strength. Utrecht retained the ancient privilege of electing its bishops, but, with the rise of papalism, Rome sought to put Utrecht and similar sees under its thumb.

Finally, we come to “the nail in the coffin” of conciliarism with Urban VIII’s 1627 papal bull *In Coena Domini* (At the Lord’s Supper), which states: “This bull excommunicates and curses all heretics and schismatics, as well as all who favor or defend them...all who keep or print the books of heretics without papal permission, all—whether private individuals or universities, or other corporations—who appeal from a papal decree to a future General Council.” Let that sink in for a moment: If the pope issues a decree, and if you appeal to a future general council concerning that teaching, you are now branded a heretic and schismatic in the Church!

All of Urban VIII’s successors confirmed *In Coena Domini* and supported the Jesuits until one clement or kind pope, Clement XIV, suppressed the Jesuits in 1773 and discontinued the public reading of *In Coena Domini*. Here in the United States, Jesuit John Carroll, who later founded Georgetown University and served as the first U.S. bishop, was greatly pained to see the Society of Jesus suppressed. Due to their

perpetual disagreements with religious orders, the Jesuits were already expelled from the Portuguese Empire (1759), France (1764), the Two Sicilies and the Spanish Empire (1767), and, due to increasing antagonism, they would soon be expelled from Austria and Hungary (1782).

Just as the Jesuits were “decentered” by Clement XVI, the Jesuit-educated François-Marie Arouet, whom we know by his pen name, Voltaire, precipitated the 1789 French Revolution, which decentered Christianity in present-day France. Napoleon even made a public vow to overthrow the papacy – until signing a 1801 concordat with Pius VII to reestablish Catholicism in the First French Republic for political reasons. The Jesuit order would not return to France until after the 1814-1815 Congress of Vienna and the 1815 exile of Napoleon.

With that, we come to Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti (1792-1878), the Italian who served as Pope Pius IX at the time of the Old Catholic Congresses. Pio Nono, as he was called, was elected pope in 1846 and served until his death nearly 32 years later, making him the longest-ever pope. In 1810, nearly four decades before his election, the young Ferretti came to Rome at age 18. Mullinger notes that Ferretti “was remarkable neither for his attainments nor his abilities....The ignorance he exhibited at his initiatory examination was deplorable...For administration of any kind he never evinced much capacity.” The picture we get of Pio Nono is that he possessed little theological acumen, and that he was not a tremendous administrator. He was described by Mullinger as a handsome, persuasive, popular preacher. His predecessor, Gregory XVI, purportedly said: “I have made that man a cardinal against my will, for I know he will be my successor – and I’m sure that he will destroy the temporal power, and, if he lives long enough, the Church as well.” Hardly a glowing recommendation! According to Mullinger, Pio Nono was greatly influenced by his Jesuit advisors, and he abhorred theological thought and scientific advances. Even after 27 years of his pontificate, Mullinger would write of him: “He looks upon historical studies as of little value and is but superficially acquainted even with theology or with canon law. At the age of 83, he still discharges with energy and dignity the onerous duties of the pontifical chair. Slender as his theological attainments undoubtedly are, no pontiff has ever exhibited so strong a desire to define and promulgate new articles of faith.” What an irony, then, that this pope, who had such little theological attainment or acumen, would soon define and propagate new articles of faith with the help of the Jesuits who surrounded him!



We begin with the 1854 “dogma” of the Immaculate Conception. Father Peter-Ben Smith of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, likes to say that the real miracle was that the pope could infallibly proclaim a dogma even before papal infallibility was proclaimed in 1870. The proclamation of the centuries-old Franciscan teaching of the Immaculate Conception of Mary – that Mary was conceived without sin and thus could conceive Jesus without sin – would split the Western Church, thus necessitating the proclamation of the pope’s infallible proclamation of that dogma. At the time, though, this dogma of the Immaculate Conception didn’t stir quite as much controversy in the Church as did the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*. Perhaps you’ve heard of it. In this 1864 papal encyclical, Pius IX condemned the “monstrous errors” of modernity and rejected all modern thought and science. He denied the validity of civil marriages, saying that the Church alone could perform valid marriages, and he asserted the right of the Church to act independently of any state government.

In light of these two problematic statements, on the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864, the Vatican Council of 1869-1870 – which wasn’t yet known as Vatican I – had the challenge of uniting a Church that was now divided by a novel “dogma” and the pope’s anti-modernist agenda. Some bishops sided with Pio Nono against modernism, and others advocated for a more wholehearted embrace of modernist thinking, leaving no solution but to convene a council of the Roman Church to affirm the *Syllabus of Errors* on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, on December 8, 1869. Pius IX called the council to denounce those who were bitterly hostile toward the Church, to undo the impending severance of civil society from Church control, and to denounce increasing “indifferentism.” Note: Purported papal infallibility was *not* part of the agenda when the council was called in 1869.

The first warning lights on the dashboard of the Church would soon be ablaze when the Ultramontane press spread rumors of papal infallibility, and Prince Hohenlohe of Bavaria responded with a strong warning on March 9, 1869 of the detrimental effect on church/state relations of the dogmatization of the *Syllabus of Errors* or of purported papal infallibility. In Prince Hohenlohe’s land, which would host the future 1871 Old Catholic Congress in Munich, the theological and legal faculties of the University of Munich concurred with their prince.

One prominent voice at the University of Munich was Dr. Johann Joseph Ignatius von Döllinger (1799-1890), an authority on Catholic history in Germany. Born in 1799, he was 70 years old when the Vatican

Council convened. As a young man in 1826, Döllinger authored his first book, *Doctrine of the Eucharist in the First Three Centuries*. In 1833-1835, he published a two-volume work titled *Church History*. In 1836 to 1843, Döllinger wrote his *Compendium of the History of the Church down to the Reformation*. During this entire time, Döllinger was perceived to be a pillar of Ultramontanism, a supporter of the pope and of the Romanist agenda. A member of the national assembly, he was deposed from both his professorship and from his seat in the national assembly during the tumultuous times of 1848 Bavaria; he was then elected to the national assembly as a deputy of the Liberal Party. Döllinger continued writing. In 1853, he published *The Roman Church in the Third Century*. In 1857, he wrote *Paganism and Judaism*. In 1860, he published *Christianity and the Church at the Period of Their Foundation*. In 1861, he wrote of the dangers that threatened the temporal power of the pope in *The Church and the Churches*. Due to this man's knowledge of Church history, the Old Catholic Congress a decade later would center around him, his faculty and his university. It's important to understand that without Döllinger, we would likely not have Old Catholicism today. Stepping back in time, though, a decade earlier, he was still an Ultramontanist, a supporter of the papacy and its teachings. In fact, Mullinger states that Döllinger was "mainly responsible for the mental slavery, the narrow views, and servile and superstitious submission to the Pope observable in the Catholic clergy of Bavaria." Yikes!

That's the pre-conversion Döllinger, before his "road to Damascus" experience. That event came in 1863, when Professor Jakob Forhschammer, a liberal theologian of the University of Munich, was accused of modernism and liberalism. Döllinger chaired the committee that sided with the pope and the archbishop of Munich against Professor Forhschammer, and Döllinger sent the telegraph to Pius IX, informing the pope that the committee had decided, "in the sense of the subjection of science to authority." Forhschammer was silenced, humiliated and isolated – and this was something that Döllinger had to live with. In the estimation of Mullinger, Döllinger's 1863 actions may have hastened the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*! We'll come back to Döllinger.

It was the spring of 1870, and the Vatican Council was underway. The Ultramontanist press was sharing whispers of papal infallibility, and Archbishop of Paris Georges Darboy, one of the most vocal opponents of purported papal infallibility, obviously shaped by the theologians of the University of Paris, felt compelled to respond. He was joined by Bishop Félix Dupanloup of Orleans, France, who, together with other Frenchman, had drawn the hostility of the Jesuits for maintaining the

Gallican Liberties against Ultramontanist pretensions. This antagonism was now on full display between the pope and these French bishops.

Here in the United States, we bow our heads in the direction of the Bishop Peter Richard Kendrick of St. Louis, Missouri, who was the greatest critic of purported papal infallibility here in the United States. Toward the end of the council, he even published a pamphlet that pulled together all the arguments against purported papal infallibility. In the spring of 1870, before papal infallibility was brought before the council, he joined the French bishops in decrying it.

As the council got underway, its *methodus* or *ordo*—its list of operating rules—was published. Undoing the conciliar actions of the Council of Constance and the Council of Basel, the pope alone would possess the sole right to initiate topics of discussion. The pope alone would decide which topics could be discussed by the council! The pope also pretended to possess exclusive right to nominate council officers, rather than allow the assembled bishops to elect their own officers. Finally, the pope reserved the right to exclude from discussion any proposal, even those that were approved by a council commission. From the outset, then, the pope and those who surrounded him were setting up their success—which would certainly be deemed the failure of the council by others.

Mullinger paints a picture of the opening ceremony of the council on December 8, 1869: The council convened amid ominous signs of thunder and pouring rain. Seeing that they were outnumbered, the liberal bishops, primarily from Germany and Hungary, met on December 22 to strategize a remedy for the numerical preponderance of Italian bishops at the council. Let's look at the numbers: 921 bishops were invited to the Vatican Council, 767 of them appeared, and, of those 767 bishops, 276 (or 36%) were Italian. The liberal bishops noted that the Italian bishops represented a total of 27 million Roman Catholics in Italy, while the 67 German and Hungarian bishops represented 46 million Roman Catholics—nearly twice the number of Roman Catholics in Italy! How could they use these numbers to their advantage? They brought forward the proposal that, like the ancient councils, every country should have the same weight, the same vote, such that Hungary, Germany and Italy would all have equal votes. The Italians, of course, including Pio Nono, were not going to allow this, and the Ultramontane press contributed to the argument: The bishop of Formione, with 70,000 Roman Catholics, was, of course, entitled to the same weight as the archbishop of Cologne, with two million (30 times more) Catholics!

Six days after the liberal bishops met, the schema of the council was published on December 28, 1869 and included a Jesuit compendium of

their doctrine to amplify the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*. Prince-Archbishop Joseph Othmar Ritter von Rauscher of Austria and seven other liberal bishops spoke out against this, including Bishop Joseph George Strossmayer of Bosnia, who decried the autocratic expressions of this compendium of doctrine, which would solidify the *Syllabus of Errors*. What's interesting, though, is how alarmed the Italian bishops and those who sided with the Ultramontanists were at the opposition of French and German bishops.

After December 28, the council did not meet again until Epiphany, January 6, 1870. When the council reconvened, now sensing this antipathy of the French and German bishops toward the designs of the Italian bishops and those who advised them, the latter opted to disguise the unsatisfactory progress of the council by focusing the bishops instead on other matters. They also introduced a new rule that prohibited applause after speeches.

Then it came: The purported papal infallibility first suggested by Diego Laynez and rumored in the Ultramontane press, now came to the floor as a result of Bishops Ignatius von Senestry of Regensburg (just north of Munich) and Konrad Martin of Paderborn (also of present-day Germany), who proposed "that the Holy Council...should define clearly and in words that admit of no doubt, that the authority of the Roman pontiff is supreme, and therefore exempt from error, when in matters of faith and morality he decrees and ordains what is to be believed and held by all the faithful of Christ and what is to be rejected and condemned by them." 137 bishops—largely French, German and Hungarian—signed a counter petition to oppose the motion. Remember, though, how the council was structured: Their petition needed to go through a commission, then be approved by the pope. Pio Nono, of course, rejected their petition.

Wondering what to do and feeling somewhat desperate, they appealed to the French ambassador Marquis de Bouneville, who relayed a message to Cardinal Antonelli that the pope would no longer be able to count on the support of France if it went forward with any notion of purported papal infallibility. The pope and those surrounding him pulled back, right? Wrong. The Vatican responded by asserting its rights, the rights of the council, and its freedom from interference from state governments, like those of France, Germany and Hungary. Yikes again!

Interestingly, the bishops who rallied as best they could against infallibility were now joined by theologians who joined the cause—including the recent convert from papalism to episcopatism, Dr. Döllinger of Munich. They also counted on the support of Dr. Edward

Pusey, whose new book, *Is Healthful Reunion Impossible?*, arrived at the council, warning of the proposed dogma's detrimental effect on reunion with the East and with the Church of England. If the Roman Catholic Church moved forward with a doctrine of purported papal infallibility, future reunion would likely be impossible with the Church of the East, from which the Western Church had divided in 1054, and with the Church of England, which divided from the Church of Rome in 1534.

How did the pope respond? On February 22, 1870, he issued a new *regolamento* to "facilitate the dispatch of business." These new rules tightened the screws on dissent. Going forward, the president of the assembly (often someone other than the pope, in the pope's absence) could silence any speaker at any time. A majority vote could bring any debate to a close. And all future decrees would be determined by a majority of bishops. Consider the implications of that final point: Despite the fact that dogmas of the Church historically received unanimous support, expressing the universal support of the Church, any decree carried by *half the bishops plus one* would now be considered a decree of the council! The Roman Church was heading down a very dangerous road, where any teaching, even if far from enjoying universal support, could be a doctrine of the Church. In contrast, the opposition insisted that all decrees of the council must have unanimous consent.

*Carpe diem*. "Seize the day," we say in English. Despite this change in rules, the opposing bishops chose to remain in Rome, rather than go home, and so, as Mullinger writes, "Their antagonists turned their hesitation to rapid advantage by now bringing forward the dogma concerning papal infallibility in its most arrogant and uncompromising form." The antagonists in this story—the Romanists, the Ultramontanists, those who sided with Pio Nono—now brought forward the possible dogma of purported papal infallibility, knowing that they only needed a majority of bishops to vote in favor of it for it to be a decree of the council. Lord Acton, who succeeded John Henry Newman as editor of *The Rambler* and who reported the affairs of the council under the pen name Quirinius, wrote,

This was the answer to the protesting movement....The Curia has known how to give so emphatic an expression to its contempt for opposition, that even the sharpest and bitterest words would show less scorn and insolence. By choosing the precise moment, when the minority declare that their conscience is troubled and in doubt about the legitimacy and result of the Council altogether, for bringing forward the very

decree which has all along been the main cause of that doubt and trouble of conscience.

The papalists exploited the opportunity: Their opponent's consciences were troubled by the legitimacy of the council, and now the papalists brought forward the very doctrine that would put the legitimacy of the council in dispute.

We come to the inevitable collision on March 22, 1870. Recall that the presiding officer of the assembly of bishops could shut down a speaker at any moment, so opposing bishops had to find creative ways of addressing the issue. Friedrich Cardinal von Schwarzenberg of Austria alluded to infallibility and was called to order by the presiding officer. Bishop Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis, Missouri spoke of the necessity of defending episcopal rights and privileges. Bishop Joseph George Strossmayer of Bosnia protested the stigmatization of Protestant churches as the parents of the "monstrous systems" of mythism rationalism and indifference, suggesting instead that the indifference of the pre-reformation Roman Catholic Church was the cause of such purported "evils." At these words, the presiding officer, 87-year-old cardinal and papal camerlengo Filippo de Angelis, reportedly cried, "*Hicce non est locus laudandi Protestantas!* (This is not the place for praising Protestants)," and an uproar ensued. Imagine it like a scene in a movie: Mullinger notes "the Palace of the Inquisition [was] hardly a hundred paces from the spot where he [was] speaking," and now the antagonists were chanting, "*Omnes, omnes illum damnamus!* [All of us, all of us condemn him]" Amid loud protests, Strossmayer remained at the podium. Over the shouts of bishops, he yelled, "That alone can be imposed on the faithful as a dogma which has a moral unanimity of the Church!" One U.S. bishop, according to Mullinger, reported that this group of assembled bishops was even rougher than the U.S. Congress!

Nations responded to the notion of purported papal infallibility. France and Austria, while disclaiming any intention to interfere—recall how the efforts of the French ambassador were previously rebuffed by the pope!—repudiated all acts of the Church as being in direct antagonism to the principles of European nations. Prussia, Portugal and Bavaria protested. Quirinius (Lord Acton) wrote, "All give warning they shall regard the threatened decrees on the power and infallibility of the Pope as a declaration of war against the order and authority of the State." What do you do if you're the ruler of a nation and suddenly the bishop of Rome is making the claim of infallibility on the fealty of your people? Anglican bishop Harold Browne of Ely, England protested to the House

of Lords that the council was neither a general council, nor was it free, due to the duress it suffered under the heavy hand of Pio Nono.

Then came the next blow: the universal papal jurisdiction of the pope! A draft *schema de fide et ratione* (schema of faith and reason) came before the council. Chapter three made explicit that the pope is the “ordinary and immediate” over the entire Church. Lord Acton, writing as Quirinius, reacted: “There is no longer any episcopate, and thus one grade of the hierarchy is abolished.” If this constitution were enacted, the pope would exercise jurisdiction over every single Roman Catholic diocese in the world, and all Roman Catholic bishops would be reduced to papal commissaries! Pause for a moment to consider how far the Roman Church had strayed from the ideal of the episcopatism of the ancient Church, where each bishop was the “overseer” of his community, walking together in synodality with all other bishops. We know the result: It’s the hierarchy possessed by the Roman Church to this day, where all bishops are appointed by and report to Rome.

The schema was passed by the majority as the *Constitutio dogmatica prima de ecclesia Christi* (First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ). To prevent an appeal of papal decrees to a future council, it proclaimed, “It is a departure from truth to assert that it is lawful to appeal from the decisions of the Roman pontiffs to an Ecumenical Council, as though to an authority superior to the Roman pontiff.” Reversing the decrees of Constance and Basel, papalism triumphed over episcopatism, and there was now no authority superior to the pope.

The document didn’t stop there. Chapter four addressed purported papal infallibility:

The gift of unfailing truth and faith was divinely bestowed on Peter and on his successors in this Chair, that they might discharge the duties of their exalted office for the salvation of all; that the universal flock of Christ, turned by them from the poisonous food of error, might be nourished by heavenly teaching, that the occasion of schism being removed, the whole Church might be preserved in unity, and supported by its foundation, might stand firm against the gates of hell. But since in this our age, in which the salutary efficacy of the Apostolic office is more than ever required, not a few are found who oppose its authority, we judge it necessary solemnly to assert the prerogative which the only begotten Son of God deigned to join to the supreme pastoral office. Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition derived from the commencement of the Christian faith...we teach and

define that it is a divinely-revealed dogma: that the Roman pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of his office as Pastor and Doctor of all Christians, he defines, in virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, is endowed with the divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, with that infallibility with which our divine Redeemer willed that the Church should be furnished in defining doctrine of faith or morals; and, therefore, that such definitions of the Roman pontiff are irreformable of themselves and not in virtue of the consent of the Church. That if any (which may God avert) shall presume to contradict this, our definition, let him be anathema.

These words are rich in meaning. The doctrine—or “dogma,” if you prefer—of the Immaculate Conception split the Church. The Pope’s views, as expressed in the *Syllabus of Errors*, split the Church. Now, rather than work to heal and unite the Church, the purported papal infallibility embedded in chapter four of the *First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ*, with its appeal to the “infallibility” of Peter and his “successors,” would make that split irreparable. Any notion of episcopalism was wiped from the Roman Church, and bishops were no longer necessary in the process of defining the faith that is to be universally held by all. Further, all who opposed this were to be considered cursed, excluded, anathema, excommunicated!

Let the debate begin! “Discussion” on purported papal infallibility opened on May 15, 1870. Bishop Karl von Hefele of Rottenburg, whom we hold in high esteem in the Independent Catholic tradition, shared a historical perspective on papal infallibility. Noting that a decree not accepted by all bishops would not have binding force universally, Archbishop Georges Darboy of Paris urged deferring purported papal infallibility to a future council. Bishop Joseph George Strossmayer of Bosnia pointed to the three ancient criteria of faith: antiquity of the teaching, universality of the teaching, and agreement on the teaching. Purported papal infallibility failed on all three criteria. He also argued that infallibility would be the death knell of the general councils. Among the antagonists, Archbishop Henry Manning of Westminster, England suggested that all who denied papal infallibility be excommunicated. Allowed by a self-confident majority, the debate on purported papal infallibility continued for days.

One of my favorite voices during that time was Bishop Henri Maret of the titular see of Sura, who pointed on June 3 to the absurd contradiction



of a council “conferring” infallibility on a pope! Think about that for a moment: If the pope is infallible, why does he not simply proclaim this of himself, rather than insist that a council bestow this on him? Needless to say, after Bishop Maret made that observation, 150 bishops rose up and signed a petition to end the debate and call for a vote. Amid other council business, the initial vote on purported papal infallibility was scheduled for July 13, 1817, with the final vote on the matter to follow some seven days later.

Bishops at the council had four possible actions in any initial vote: They could abstain (thus not registering that they were in favor or against a motion), they could vote *placet* (literally that the proposal was “pleasing” to them), they could vote *non placet* (that the proposal was not amenable to them), or they could vote *placet juxta modum* (giving conditional assent but reserving the right to propose modifications in writing before the final vote).

So, you’re wondering: How did the initial vote on purported papal infallibility go? Of the 540 bishops present, 91 abstained (they refused to take a public stand on the issue!), 400 (62.5% of those present) voted *placet*, 88 voted *non placet*, and 61 voted *placet juxta modum*. A very divided vote, it hardly suggested universal support for what would soon be ramrodded through as a decree of the council! Personally, I’m most intrigued by the high number of abstentions, showing the temerity of nearly one in five bishops to publicly oppose inevitable papalist tendencies.

The final vote on purported papal infallibility was scheduled for six days later, on July 18, 1870. After the initial vote, though, Archbishop Darboy of Paris gathered the opposing bishops and suggested that they all leave Rome before the final vote on the dogma. Most did. Before leaving, Archbishop Darboy published and shared a pamphlet stating that the intervention of the pope extinguished the freedom of the council. In essence, because the council was not free, its utterances could not be deemed as authoritative or universally-binding teachings of the Church.

On July 18, only two bishops voted *non placet*. We are compelled to lift them up as profiles of courage, as real heroes and saints in the Independent Catholic movement. They were Bishop Aloisio Riccio of Cajazzo, Sicily and the only U.S. bishop to vote against purported papal infallibility in the final vote: Bishop Edward Fitzgerald of Little Rock, Arkansas. Don’t ever talk down about folks from Arkansas: Their courageous bishop got it right on the final vote on purported papal infallibility by voting *non placet*! In a likely imaginative retelling, Mullinger writes, “As the Pope read aloud the decree of his own

infallibility, a storm, which had long been gathering, broke over St. Peter's, and the decree was read by the aid of a taper, and to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning." What a great image: of the pope proclaiming his own "infallibility" in the middle of a great storm of thunder and lightning, to the light of a candle in a church filled with darkness!

Lord Acton, writing as Quirinius, shared: "Future historians will begin a new period of Church history with July 18, 1870, as with October 31, 1517." What happened at the Vatican Council was, in his estimation, no less significant than Martin Luther's purported nailing of his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany!

As luck would have it, on the same day that a literal or figurative storm descended on Rome with the proclamation of purported papal infallibility—though opposed, as we noted, by two brave bishops—France declared war on Prussia, thrusting Europe into the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. As a result, the Vatican Council was suspended.

I really appreciate Mullinger's telling of these events. He unarguably possessed his own biases—why else would he have written an entire book on the matter?—but writing in 1875, he pulled together the accounts of people who had lived through the past five years. His telling may conflict with other accounts, which, for instance, might suggest that bishops fled Rome in light of the impending Franco-Prussian War. He clearly indicates the angst of the liberal bishops who, seeing "the handwriting on the wall" after the initial vote on purported papal infallibility, knew that they could not simultaneously be true to their consciences and to the papalist forces that allowed them to assume positions of power and now demanded their unwavering obedience in return.

We often refer to ourselves as the "post-Vatican II Church." Step back in time, and imagine living in the "post-Vatican I Church." Before leaving Rome, the opposing bishops gathered and agreed that they would not act as individuals, without consulting one another. This would severely handicap their future efforts. Further, they returned to their dioceses, where they had to weigh the benefit of future resistance, knowing that they could lose the comforts that accompanied their positions of power in the Church. French theologian Eugene-Philibert Michaud, whom, as we'll hear in a moment, renounced the Roman Catholic Church, observed, "The Pope perfectly well knew that [dissenting bishops] were not of the race of St. Paul, and would prefer

their personal comfort and the preservation of their bishoprics to duty; and he dealt with them accordingly.”

Consider this: Old Catholicism did not come into existence as a result of all those bishops who opposed purported papal infallibility. It was birthed by the courageous theologians and lay leaders who soon filled the vacuum left by the acquiescence to Rome by those bishops!

Now comfortably back in Germany, 17 German bishops wrote in a pastoral letter that it was incompatible with the principles of the Catholic religion to assert that papal infallibility was not contained in scripture and tradition. That sentence contains two negatives, which makes for difficult reading: Catholics cannot argue that papal infallibility is not in scripture and tradition!

Noting how Prussia “kissed the Pope’s toe before the eyes of the whole world,” German philosopher Franz Mehring wrote: “It is grievous that not a single bishop in Bavaria and Germany should have remained true to us.” Lord Acton noted that opposing bishops, who apparently abused their freedom to disseminate “heresies,” were now forced to refute what they had previously said about the intrigue, treachery and force of the council. All those courageous bishops who had previously spoken out were now “eating crow” as they took a step back, engaged in a delicate dance, and “reassessed” their stand on purported papal infallibility!

Let’s go back to Munich, the site of the 1871 Old Catholic Congress. As part of this delicate dance, the archbishop of Munich returned from the council and gathered the theologians of the University of Munich. According to Mullinger’s account, he told them, “*Roma locuta est* [Rome has spoken]...We have no other course before us than to submit. Personally, I’m fond of Mullinger’s account of the exchange, which suggests that the archbishop painted the best-possible picture of the novel doctrine, attempting to rally support for it. Mullinger suggests that the archbishop then looked in the direction of Dr. Döllinger, the old bastion of Ultramontanism, and asked, “Ought we not to be ready to begin to labor fresh in the cause of the Holy Church?” Döllinger, in this account, replied, “Yes. Yes, for the *Old Church*,” to which the archbishop responded, “There is but one Church, and that is neither new nor old.” Döllinger retorted, “But they have made a *new* [Church]!” And the archbishop had the last word: “You know, of course, that there always have been changes in the Church and in her doctrines.”

In that anecdote, we see the Old Catholic yearning to return to the structure and practices of the ancient Church, of the “old” Church, rather than subscribe to the novel heresies of the papist Church of Rome, which continued to deviate from the “north star” of the faith.

Whereas cowardly (or perhaps practical?), loyalist bishops were unwilling to challenge papalist pretensions, theologians were not. In Nuremberg, 14 Catholic professors published a declaration against what they called “the Vatican treason.” They rejected the Vatican Council. They wrote, “Infallible rules of faith...teach the subjection of states, people and princes to the authority of the Popes even in secular matters, and establish principles, concerning the tolerance of heretics and the civil rights of the clergy, opposed to the present order of society.” They noted that peaceful church/state relations would be impossible in the future for a few reasons: Now the pope could set himself above all other secular rulers, the Roman Church could now infallibly brand others – including rulers – as heretics, and the Church could create an intolerable situation for people of other religions.

Efforts of opposition multiplied. Eminent theologians and their students embraced the cause. Canonist Dr. Friedrich Ritter von Schulte of Prague wrote that infallibility was incompatible with the principles of canon law. The people of Coblenz came together and signed a protest against the council’s declarations. Supporters of Vatican opposition in Cologne formed a publication, the *Rheinischer Merkur* (Rhineland Mercury), and leaders in Munich published a response saying, “We do not accept the decrees illegally established at Rome on July 18; we remain true to our ancient Catholic faith, in which our [ancestors] lived and died, and shall therefore offer an active and passive resistance to every attempt to force on us a new doctrine or to drive us out of the Church.”

In Germany, the archbishop of Cologne deprived a Father Tangermann of his parish in Unkel, due to his resistance to the novelties of the Vatican council, and, according to Mullinger, Father Tangermann began organizing an “Old Catholic” resistance movement. Many priests, though, were afraid to protest the authority of their bishops, so opposition to the Vatican Council fell to others. The *Rheinischer Merkur* attempted to clarify why Roman Catholic clergy failed to oppose Vatican decrees, writing, “From the moment a young man takes orders, he submits himself, body and soul, mind and conscience, to his bishop....An appeal to conscience is a protest against the bishop’s authority, therefore against one whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to govern the Church of God.” Imagine that: Once you are ordained a priest, you are no longer morally responsible; if you are obedient, the Church will tell you what to do!

Another priest is worthy of mention: Hyacinthe Loyson, a Sulpician priest and professor, resigned his professorship to become a Carmelite

friar, only to declare himself independent of the Roman Catholic Church around the time of the Vatican Council. After publishing a pamphlet that criticized the conditions under which the Vatican Council was assembled, he traveled to New York, where his preaching brought together large audiences. He returned to England where he was married, thus definitively ending his relationship with the Carmelites and with the Roman Catholic Church. In January 1871, Loyson wrote against the opposition bishops who brought discredit to their former cause by embracing papal infallibility. He also suggested that the rejection of the Vatican Council was not a right, but a duty. Loyson wrote that the Body of Christ suffered from five wounds: the darkening of God's Word (the withholding of scriptures from the people and not translating the Word into the vernacular), the oppression of intellect and conscience through the abuse of hierarchical power, enforced celibacy, the Roman Church's worldliness of policy, and the Roman Church's superstitious devotion. What an image: of a mortally-wounded Church, like Jesus on the cross!

Meanwhile, back in Munich, the archbishop demanded the submission of Dr. Döllinger and of German theologian Johann Friedrich, who rejected the council's decrees. Of the two, Döllinger is most remembered in Old Catholicism, largely due to his March 28, 1871 public letter in the Augsburg newspaper. Döllinger wrote that the Vatican Council reversed the Councils of Constance and Basel, that infallibility is maintained on untenable grounds, that the scriptures have been misinterpreted—or I would say, disinterpreted—to support purported papal infallibility, and that dogmas of the Church must enjoy universal support (in a way that papal infallibility and the universal jurisdiction of the pope did not). Döllinger concluded, "As a Christian, a theologian, a historical student, and as a citizen, I cannot receive the doctrine." The archbishop of Munich simply responded that Döllinger's adherence to such opinions convicted him of heresy and disobedience to the authority of the Church, as asserted by the council.

When all Roman Catholic bishops took a step back, it was courageous Catholic theologians, like Friedrich and Döllinger, who stayed firm and "toed the line," and who decided they would continue to reject the novelties of the Vatican Council. The Munich faculty initially sided with Döllinger, but, after the excommunication of Döllinger and Friedrich, they felt compelled to separate themselves from him. Lay leaders had petitioned the king of Bavaria on April 10 to oppose the doctrine, and they now gathered 12,000 signatures to a second petition. German bishops responded with two manifestos: one addressed to clergy, and the other to laity, both stressing complete submission to the council

decrees. Pio Nono warned that leaders of the liberal movement should be dreaded more than communists, “those friends let loose from hell.”

As a result, Döllinger was increasingly aware of the fact that it was no longer possible to appeal to acquiescing bishops, and that the People of God would instead have to appeal to theologians and the uniform tradition of the Church. He wrote this into a manifesto that was co-signed by 30 others.

Then, in June 1871, an event happened that tugged at the heart strings of many: On his deathbed, Dr. Franz Xaver Zenger, an esteemed professor of law at the University of Munich, sent for a Franciscan friar to share with him the sacraments of the Church, and, discovering that Zenger was a sympathizer of Döllinger, the friar refused the dying man the sacraments of his Church. In a daring move, Johann Friedrich, who was excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church, secured the Eucharist from a friend, shared the sacraments of viaticum and last rites with Dr. Zenger, and later presided at his funeral. It was a strong statement that this nascent group of Old Catholics no longer needed the bishops and priests of the Roman Catholic Church!

The supporters of Döllinger and Friedrich gathered 18,000 signatures on a petition for the exercise of their religious rights without interference, and for a state-furnished church in which to worship. As I’m fond of saying: There are two paths to power and influence in this world: organized people and organized resources. The German Old Catholics were now organizing people and using public opinion to pressure the state chamber to recognize them.

In August 1871, Döllinger was elected rector of the University of Munich. At the same time, there were six vacant seats on the university’s senate: All were filled by individuals who resisted the Vatican decrees, including Friedrich. Both actions were a slap in the face to the archbishop of Munich, who excommunicated Döllinger and Friedrich.

And that brings us, finally, to the Old Catholic Congress of 1871. It has taken us a while to get here, but this context, I believe, is important.

On September 22-24, 1871, some 500 people from almost every country in Europe – and also from North America and Brazil – gathered in Munich, for an assembly presided over by Dr. Friedrich Ritter von Schulte, a canonist formerly of the University of Prague who was now at the University of Bonn. Cleverly, the Old Catholics included two honorary vice presidents of the gathering: the statesman Friedrich Emil Welti of Bern, Switzerland and Bernhard Windscheid, the professor of Roman law at Heidelberg University. Those who assembled shared various beliefs, including that they should organize Old Catholic

congregations and unions throughout Europe, and that the Jesuits had to be oppressed for the tranquility of Church and State.

The Old Catholic Congress of 1871 passed four resolutions on religious policy: (1) Old Catholic priests should be instituted where local committees deem them necessary, (2) Old Catholic priests are entitled to state recognition, (3) where practicable, this recognition is to be claimed, and (4) foreign bishops would be solicited for episcopal functions while Old Catholics of Germany worked to establish their own episcopal jurisdiction “as soon as the proper time has arrived.”

The Congress also passed four resolutions on doctrine. The first was quite lengthy:

We hold fast to the Old Catholic faith, as witnessed in Scripture and in tradition, and to the Old Catholic worship. As rightful members of the Catholic Church, we refuse to be expelled either from Church communion or from the enjoyment of ecclesiastical and social rights proceeding from the same....We reject the dogmas set up under Pope Pius IX in contradiction to the teachings of the Church and to the principles of the Apostolic Council, especially that of the infallible teaching office and of the supreme jurisdiction of the Pope.

We see here the two major complaints from the Vatican Council: purported papal infallibility and the purported supreme or universal jurisdiction of the pope. The second resolution stated: “We hold fast to the ancient constitution of the Church, and repudiate every attempt to thrust out the bishops from the immediate and independent direction of the separate churches.” In essence, they decried the elimination of the episcopal office or its reduction to mere papal commissaries. The remaining two doctrinal resolutions included the necessity of Church reform and the desirability of allowing laity to participate in Church policy.

Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the “Jansenist Church in Utrecht” (as the Roman Catholic Ultramontanes had labeled it) were already calling themselves *Oud-Katholieken* (Old Catholic). As well-read as he was, Döllinger no doubt knew this. Historically, this Dutch Old Catholic Church had sheltered from Louis XIV’s intolerance the likes of Antoine Arnauld, Pierre Nicole and Pasquier Quesnel. Though denying Pio Nono’s claims with respect to the Immaculate Conception and the universal papal jurisdiction, the Dutch Old Catholics accepted the Council of Trent, which now created an interesting tension for the Old

Catholics of Germany. It encouraged the translation of scripture and liturgy in the vernacular, and it opposed the superstitious teachings of mendicants. Mullinger describes the Dutch Old Catholic Church thus: "Between the coldness of the Lutheran party [of the House of Orange] and the hostility of the Jesuits, this inoffensive community found itself isolated and defenseless." Mullinger estimated that the Dutch Old Catholic Church possessed some 6,000 adherents in 1875.

For the first time now, we'll see an alliance between the Dutch Old Catholic Church and the newly-forming Old Catholics in Germany. Three representatives of the Utrecht Church attended the 1871 Old Catholic Congress in Munich, where one Congress resolution manifested solidarity with the Dutch Church and other non-Roman churches: "We declare that the reproach of Jansenism against the Utrecht Church is causeless; there is no dogmatic difference between her and ourselves. We hope for reunion with the Oriental-Greek and the Russian Churches, separation from these having been unnecessary and founded upon no irreconcilable dogmatic differences....We hope for a gradual understanding with the Protestant and the Episcopal Churches." This was radical. While the Roman Catholic Church pushed away every other church, deeming them all to be heretics, the Old Catholic Congress of 1871 took a first step toward building communion with those churches of good faith.

Another resolution of the 1871 Old Catholic Congress addressed the education and status of "inferior clergy," stating,

We regard the culture of scientific knowledge as imperatively necessary in the training of the Catholic clergy....We look upon the exclusion...of the clergy from the intellectual training of the age as dangerous, in consequence of their great influence, to civilization, and as entirely inappropriate to the education of a morally-virtuous, scientifically-intelligent and patriotic clergy.

We'll see the same themes repeated 30 years later during the formation of the Philippine Independent Church, which wrestled with the issue of an "inferior clergy," the indigenous Filipino clergy, and sought to create a church that possessed a similarly "morally-virtuous, scientifically-intelligent and patriotic clergy."

Rather than eschew state powers, the Old Catholic Congress of 1871 suggested fidelity to civil power, saying,



We hold fast to the constitutions of our countries, which guarantee civil freedom and humanitarian culture; and we assert our loyal and steadfast adhesion to our governments in the contest against the dogmatized Ultramontanism of the *Syllabus*.”

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church was pushing away the national governments of its day, the Old Catholic Congress of 1871 pulled them close, encouraging the loyalty and adhesion of Old Catholics to their civil governments.

Finally, the Old Catholic Congress of 1871 advanced, “We maintain our right to all real goods and possessions of the Church.” In essence, it staked its claim as a legitimate church deserving of access to all state resources that were divided among churches.

What happened after the Old Catholic Congress of September 1871? The archbishop of Munich excommunicated four more parish priests as a result of their affiliation with Old Catholicism. Mullinger tells the story that on October 28, 1871, the archbishop of Munich was inside the parish of one of those excommunicated priests, reading aloud the decree of excommunication—while the congregation was outside, listening to their excommunicated pastor, Father Bernard, who “ascended a stone pulpit without walls.” The Old Catholic Church of Germany saw the quick formation of 23 more congregations. On November 8, 1871, Johann Friedrich published his *Tagebuch*, his daybook or journal from the Vatican Council, which shared insights into what was actually happening inside the council.

The Old Catholic Church of Germany now found itself “between a rock and a hard place”: The Church of Utrecht asked German Old Catholics to stand by the decrees of the Council of Trent, and German Old Catholics knew that such adherence would impede unity with Lutherans and the Church of England.

At the end of 1871, Döllinger shared his first inaugural address as rector of the University of Munich. He said, “History, philosophy and above all theology, have received a fresh impulse. We are entering upon a new era in the religious history of Europe; and it is evident that the narrow polemical spirit which has prevailed since the Reformation must give place to one of compromise and reconciliation.” He also pointed to the growing desire for unity among separated churches.

Most states governments tried to remain neutral—until they couldn’t any longer. In response to the persecution of Old Catholics by the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, the Bavarian and Prussian governments

authorized Old Catholics to celebrate mass in the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Roman Catholic Church of St. Pantaleon in Munich in January of 1872. Though the church previously served as a horse stable and a Protestant garrison church, Bishop Franz Adolf Namszanowski cried that the space was now polluted, leading the government to strip him of his office as apostolic vicar of the Bavarian army. The Bavarian government went further, exempting Old Catholic congregations from having to pay church taxes to Roman Catholic parishes. And so we see the Old Catholic Church in Germany growing in prominence!

The University of Munich decided to launch a lecture series to educate laity about the Old Catholic movement, and professor of church history Joseph Reinkens—who would later be elected the first German Old Catholic bishop in 1872—stepped up to take a leading role in this lecture series. Once it was complete, he continued preaching throughout southern Germany. As a result, Bishop Heinrich Förster excommunicated Reinkens and three others, which evoked strong feelings of resistance among German Old Catholics.

It's time for us to introduce another character before we arrive at the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne. Unable to accept the Vatican decrees, Swiss-born French theologian Philibert-Eugène Michaud resigned as a priest in the Roman Catholic Church and called on all Christian communions—Eastern, Anglican, Protestant and Roman Catholic—to work together and return to the primitive, universal faith. In doing this, he noted that German Old Catholics did not accept the decrees of the Vatican Council, Protestants did not accept any council that was hostile to Reformation doctrines, and no Council after 1054 was accepted by the Greek Church. Michaud decided that all churches needed to return to the “common ground” of Christian doctrine, as universally received through the teachings of the councils of the first nine centuries. Michaud forcefully wrote that the Roman Catholic Church stands convicted of heresy due to its medieval doctrine, canonical forgeries and recent innovations. Pope Pius IX and the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church were the real schismatics!

Another important piece of this history, which tied to the upcoming 1872 Old Catholic Congress was the increasing relationship between German and Dutch Old Catholics. You recall that the Church of Utrecht sent representatives to the Old Catholic Congress of 1871. They reported back to the archbishop of Utrecht, and German Old Catholics were also looking for “foreign bishops” to perform episcopal functions until they elected their own bishop. With their growing congregations, who would the German Old Catholics call upon to perform the sacrament of

Confirmation? You guessed it! German Old Catholics hosted the Archbishop of Utrecht for Confirmations in Munich on July 5, 1872. Mullinger writes that 2,000 people witnessed the event, including two attaches of the (Roman Catholic) papal nuncio. That night, the Archbishop of Utrecht enjoyed dinner with theologians of the University of Munich, who were “resolved not to follow the *Esel-tritt*—the ass’ tread—of the blind, unreasoning submission demanded by Rome. From there, the archbishop went on to celebrate Confirmations at parishes in Kiefersfelden and Mehring. The *Rheinischer Merkur* reported: “This decided step forward—the archbishop’s confirmation tour—cannot fail to have an important bearing on the future course of the movement....Several thousands of people have now been not only shaken loose from faith in an infallible Pope, and from confidence in a good deal more of Ultramontane teaching, but have visibly realized that they can have a bishop....A powerful link has been snapped—a powerful spell broken.” Old Catholics were increasingly aware that they didn’t need Roman Catholic bishops!

And now, the moment you’ve been waiting for: We have finally arrived at the event whose sesquicentennial we celebrate this year: the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne!

In 1871, the first old Catholic Congress was held in Munich, in southeast Germany, which is near Austria and Switzerland. The second Old Catholic Congress was now called for September 20-22, 1872 in Cologne, the principal city of the Rhineland, some 350 miles northwest of Munich, thus facilitating the participation of their new friends from the Netherlands. Some 500 to 1,000 attendees showed up—Mullinger shares both numbers. The Archbishop of Utrecht was present, with four other clergy. Two bishops and eight other leaders represented the Church of England. Loyson and Michaud—supporters of the idea of French Old Catholicism—were present.

The 1872 Old Catholic Congress acknowledged the challenge: The more that they advanced and diverged from Rome, the more difficult it would be to reconcile with Rome at a later date. They authorized the establishment of regular parish priests, and they organized a committee of clergy and laity to take steps toward the election of a bishop. They organized a reunion committee, chaired by Döllinger, that would report to the next congress in 1873. In terms of ecumenical relations, they took a step forward in their relationships with the Church of Utrecht and the Church of England.

Professor Reinkens shared a fiery address, emphasizing that their unity would not consist in uniformity, that they would not try to

“convert” others, and that they would not efface national peculiarities. Instead, they would appeal to the confession of the early, undivided Church. During the congress, Michaud later proposed that German Old Catholics disavow all Western councils, but, knowing that the Dutch Old Catholics clung to Trent, Reinkins suggested that this was premature, noting instead that German Old Catholics certainly rejected the decrees of the recent Vatican Council. With respect to ecumenical relations, another professor, Friedrich Michelis, noted that, in the same way that the unconnected tower, nave and choir of the Roman Catholic cathedral of Cologne were simultaneously constructed and then connected, that it was time for all churches to be united into a single, great “cathedral.”

Contentious topics at the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne included necessary reforms within the Roman Catholic Church, the evil of clerical celibacy, the abuses of the confessional, the injurious influence of religious orders, the Ultramontane disdain for the individual conscience (and the transfer of all moral responsibility to the pope, to whom Roman Catholics were expected to be obedient), and the multiplicity of dogmas versus the simplicity of the early Church’s creed.

That, “in a nutshell,” was the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne! After that event, the German Old Catholic Church continued to grow, and the movement began to “pick up steam” outside of Germany and Netherlands. Two Austrian parishes were added. Mullinger shares the story of a Father Geschwind in the Canton of Olton, Switzerland, who was censured for preaching against infallibility: Swiss law prevented his removal from the parish without sufficient cause, so the bishop sent him a letter of excommunication, which, according to Mullinger’s report, was torn up by the priest in the presence of the messenger, with the priest’s observation that his bishop had actually excommunicated himself through his adherence to a heretical “dogma.” That event, says Mullinger, led to 3,000 Old Catholics convening a meeting at Geschwind’s parish, to address their free exercise of religion.

We’ll save the details for future conversations, but the 1873 Old Catholic Congress in Constance elected Reinkins as the first German Old Catholic bishop. In 1874, the Congress was hosted in Freiburg, Switzerland, and a synod and a conference were convened in Bonn.

When Mullinger wrote his book in 1875, five years after the Vatican Council, Old Catholicism in Europe claimed 18,765 members in 32 parishes in Prussia, 15,000 members in 35 congregations (with 20 more congregations awaiting episcopal recognition) in Baden, and 13,000 members in 26 parishes in Bavaria. According to Mullinger, Old Catholicism was “virtually non-existent” in France at that time. He also

wrote, "In Switzerland, the progress has been uninterrupted." Austria was numerically weak, but gaining the sympathies of liberals. In Netherlands, Johannes Heykamp was consecrated Archbishop of Utrecht, after the see was vacant for two years. Perhaps most interesting for us here in North America, Mullinger wrote: "Across the Atlantic, in Mexico, the Old Catholics, under the name of the 'Church of Jesus,' have effected a considerable organization." It would be interesting to learn about the details of this endeavor!

Mullinger concluded,

The Pope, irritated beyond all bounds at the course of events in Germany, chose to measure his strength with the dominant party in that country, and encountered a will as determined and inflexible as his own. He ventured to declare the recent legislation in Prussia invalid, and threatened with excommunication those of the clergy who decided to obey the orders of the State. This manifesto rendered important service to the Old Catholic cause, for Prince Bismarck at once proceeded to exact from the bishops and clergy a disavowal of its requirements and a declaration of fidelity to the State....The opportunity was not lost upon the Old Catholic party, who issued at Berlin an appeal to all true Catholics to embrace the principles of the new movement and declare their loyalty to the emperor and the empire.

With that, we conclude our journey from Pio Nono's divisive doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the *Syllabus of Errors*, through the hardly-believable machinations of the First Vatican Council, to the subsequent cries for reform that resulted in the Old Catholic Congresses of 1871 and 1872—and we look forward to the continued story as we celebrate the sesquicentennial of other Old Catholic Congresses during the years to come!

**Reflections on  
A Sesquicentennial Remembrance of  
the Old Catholic Congresses of 1871 & 1872**

Robison: John Henry Newman's letters during the council, which were hidden away by the Oratorians, were recently rediscovered. He said to Ambrose St. John, his "good friend" at the oratory in Birmingham, that he was convinced that Pius IX had become deranged from his power, as a result of having been pope for so long. He was busily writing letters and telegrams, practically up to the last minute, begging European powers to persuade the Italian Army to invade the Vatican, end the council, and arrest the pope! Had Newman been a layman, he likely would have challenged the archbishop of Westminster to a duel! The archbishop of Westminster hated Newman and wanted to get rid of him, which may be part of the reason that he stood up and said, "If you're against infallibility, you should be excommunicated." I'm not sure that he really felt one way or the other about the doctrine; he just wanted to destroy Newman! After the council, Newman didn't preach or teach public as he had before. He completely retired into the oratory and was hardly seen in public until around the time of his death. Newman was completely defeated by the first Vatican Council. When the Vatican was proposing Newman for canonization, it had to "tap dance" around all that. Bismarck had invited the pope to flee to Berlin, in the event that Italian unification became too much for him to bear at the Vatican—an interesting fact in light of the fact that Prussia had a Lutheran state church. The First Vatican Council was a mess!

Božek: I'm not sure that we all realize how ridiculous Pio Nono's *Syllabus of Errors* was. Among the many theses condemned by Pius IX were freedom of speech and freedom of press, things we take for granted in this country. Every time you read or listen to the news or enjoy your freedom of speech, remember that you have officially been condemned by Pius IX and his *Syllabus of Errors*! Concerning the St. Louis part of this story, Bishop Kenrick was, as you correctly pointed out, an outspoken critic of the idea of papal infallibility and more so of the universal jurisdiction of the pope. He escaped the

Vatican before the final vote took place, but he eventually, under pressure, agreed to sign his name to the documents. He was harassed by the Roman Curia for the rest of his life. He was so depressed by the vote and couldn't live with himself, knowing that he had lost his integrity by signing the document. In 1871, he resigned all the responsibilities of the ordinary, and he transferred nearly all ordinary duties to his coadjutor bishop, Patrick John Ryan. He just could not live with himself, and he stepped away from public life, allowing his coadjutor to takeover. It's an amazing story, and he is an unsung hero of the Old Catholic movement. If there were a push for a new saint in the Old Catholic movement, he would be a great candidate!

D'Arrigo: This presentation contained a tremendous amount of information. I was raised Sicilian Roman Catholic, then ordained via the Church of England. The Church of England really turned me on to the Oxford movement, where they embraced all things Catholic about the faith. The clincher for me was Vernon Staley's book, *The Catholic Religion*, from the 1890s. Hearing this presentation made me think about the Church of England and why they would have appeared at the Old Catholic Congresses: They would have been seeing so thoroughly eye-to-eye with the philosophy being presented there. My brain was processing these events in new light. Döllinger is so extremely pivotal in this work, and I'm glad we could enjoy such a thorough teaching on him. We would not be who we are today without him!

Quintana: Rather than call ourselves "Old Catholic" here in the United States—something we talked about last night—perhaps, because of the appeal to the ancient Church, we might simply call ourselves the Catholic Church of the Way, or just the Church of the Way. Perhaps we should also work toward calling our own "congress." As we begin to work toward unity, one of the criteria would be our adherence to the orthodoxy of the ancient faith. We ought to begin to work toward the unity of our various jurisdictions, so as to one day enjoy the fellowship of the Episcopal Church and Utrecht.

Mathias: As we concluded our last interjurisdictional gathering here in Austin in May, Father Marek challenged us to consider working toward a “constitutional convention” in 2024. I know that many of us have been thinking hard on how to bring greater unity to our movement.

Furr: This presentation was extraordinary. The religious community that I was part of as a nun was founded in 1845 in Aachen, which is down the road from Cologne, so our community was very young when all this was happening. Historians of women religious movements consider the time between the First Vatican Council and the Second Vatican Council as the age of repression and oppression in the women’s movement. This presentation helped me understand my former community in its early stages of development and growth in a way that I had not considered before.

L. Walker: Jayme, you are an exceptional teacher, and I’d like to share some interesting but disconnected points. I don’t remember learning anything in the seminary—during high school, college or theology—about Vatican I. I’m totally ignorant about that period, which is interesting, because we wouldn’t want good Catholic boys to actually study and potentially disagree with the issues that were raised by Vatican II! After hearing this history of the Jesuits, I’m intrigued that the Roman Church now has a Jesuit pope who is interested in reforming the Church despite opposition. Before Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco passed, he wrote a book in defense of Vatican I. Now that I have some background on this council, I’ll have to dust off his book!

Mathias: Because I was a Conventual Franciscan Friar studying at St. Louis University, I like to joke that I have a Franciscan heart and a Jesuit mind—but when the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola rolls around every July 31, it’s really difficult to celebrate the founder of the Jesuits, who persecuted so many good people during the past 500 years!

L. Walker: When I was a Roman Catholic priest, the founder of my religious community, the Salvatorians, was born in 1848, under the repression of the German *Kulturkampf*. He founded a very strong German community in Rome, dedicated to getting the laity involved in the defense of the



Church, particularly through magazines and popular publications.

Mathias: He would have been a young man at the time of the First Vatican Council. That council no doubt made an impression on him as a young priest!

L. Walker: No doubt. It would be interesting to relook at some of that history and see how it all connects. As a true Ultramontanist, he strongly wanted to defend the pope and the Church!

**A Revolutionary Catechism  
of a Revolutionary Church:  
The 1912 Catechism of the Philippine Independent Church**

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

We've talked a lot about the Philippine Independent Church this year. This is the sesquicentennial of the 1872 martyrdom of GomBurZa, the three Filipino priests whose death inspired a wave of nationalism that led to the birth of the Philippine Independent Church (PIC) 120 years ago, in 1902. We celebrate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PIC, and when that church started 120 years ago, it veered toward certain beliefs, which is our topic today.

I begin with an apology: For nearly three weeks, we've pestered our friends from the Philippines to join us for this experience. At the Utrecht summer school, Father Nixon Jose said that he'd have Father Terry Revollido, the rector of the Aglipay Central Theological Seminary, with us this evening. Not having heard back from them, we'll attempt to do this on our own and to contribute to the corpus of works on the PIC.

Here at Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, we are currently engaged in transcribing and translating the 1912 catechism of the Philippine Independent Church and the 1902-1905 letters of Supreme Bishop Gregorio Aglipay. I want to give a shout-out to Judith Rincón and Deacon Elsa Nelligan, who are assisting with the Spanish transcriptions, and I'm completing the English translations. You can expect all four works—both books in English and Spanish—soon. Today we'll focus on what we might learn from that 1912 catechism of the largest manifestation of Inclusive Catholicism and of the Independent Sacramental Movement in our world.

The Philippine Independent Church (PIC), or the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI), as it's known in Spanish, boasts some six to eight million members served by 880 clergy. I cannot confirm these numbers. What I can verify is that in 2015 the Philippine statistics authority enumerated 756,225 persons who self-identified as Aglipayan, the adjective used of the church first led by Supreme Bishop Gregorio Aglipay from 1902 until his death in 1940. In many places throughout the world, women are the backbone of the Church; the 2015 census, however, enumerated nearly 4% more men in the Aglipayan Church (384,767) than women (371,458).

If you'd like to learn more about the Aglipayan Church, you can read our 2020 work, *Aglipayan: The Flourishing of Independent Catholicism in the Philippines*. We published that work for World Mission Sunday 2020, as we worked to raise funds for a motorbike for St. Paul's, the Aglipayan seminary in Guimaras. That work addresses the colonization of the archipelago, the story of GomBurZa, the Philippine revolt against the Spanish Crown and American imperialism, the schism that resulted in this new nationalist church. It also contains appendices that speak to Aglipayan faith, mission, spirituality, ministry, etc., as well as the church's statement toward members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

You can also check out the proceedings of our May 2022 interjurisdictional gathering, *Revolutionary Church: A Sesquicentennial Remembrance of GomBurZa and a Celebration of the Church Birthed from the Nationalism They Inspired*. This work contains the PIC liturgy that Father Henry Casanova Janiola shared with us, our "think tank" session on what we do or don't know about the PIC, and tremendous presentations by Father Henry of the PIC, Archbishop Alan Kemp of the Ascension Alliance, Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, Father Libardo Rocha of the American Catholic Church in the U.S., and Father Marek Bożek of St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church.

We're not going to repeat today anything from those works. Instead, we'll crack open the PIC's 1912 catechism, published by Supreme Bishop Aglipay, with the approval of his Supreme Council of Bishops. The cover of the work explicitly states that no one would be ordained to the presbyterate of that church without demonstrating knowledge of this work.

We note that the early PIC possessed various characteristics that prevented it from entering into deeper communion with other churches, including the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches and the Anglican Communion. As a result, the PIC took a decided turn in 1946, under the leadership of Supreme Bishop Isabelo de los Reyes, Jr., the son of PIC co-founder, Isabelo de los Reyes, Sr. It's important for us to keep in mind, then, that this 1912 catechism is not representative of PIC thought and belief beyond those 34 years, from 1912 to 1946. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the PIC was making course corrections to solidly ground the church in the Tridentine theology that it had jettisoned, to remedy its lack of possession of apostolic succession, to strengthen its hastily-framed and inadequate constitution, and to bring greater uniformity to its worship.

Before we jump into the 1912 catechism, let's speak to a bit of leadership theory. John Maxwell, who likes to refer to himself as the world's #1 author on leadership, is fond of saying, "He that thinketh he leadeth, and hath no one following, is only taking a walk!" Think about that for a moment: Leadership and followership are two sides of the same coin. You can't be a leader without followers. Contrary to what we might believe in our movement, there are no "sheepless shepherds." *Nullus episcopus sine ecclesia* (there is no bishop without a church), as Father Marek reminded us last night. Due to the nature of this two-sided leadership/followership "coin," we've seen an interest in the study of followership studies during the past 15 years. Followership asks why people are inspired or moved to follow others.

"Birds of a feather flock together," we say. Call to mind that image of Fred Flintstone as the Grand Poobah of the Loyal Order of Buffalo. What factors might influence your decision to join the Loyal Order of Buffalo? If you were inclined to be part of it, would you be part of it under the leadership of Grand Poobah Fred Flintstone? Would you be part of it under the leadership of Grand Poobah Sam Slagheap? Individual members of such organizations continually "excommunicate" themselves from such organizations—they withdraw from communion—when they discover that they are not "birds of a feather." We see this in our communities all the time: A person will come to us thinking that we're a certain thing, then they learn more about our "Loyal Order of Buffalo" or about its "Grand Poobahs," and they go elsewhere. I'm reminded of the image of Wilma Flintstone and Betty Rubble mimicking the male-only Loyal Order of Buffalo, disguised with mustaches and tall, furry hats. Some people see the clergy and members of our communities, and they judge that we are not "birds of a feather" with them. Even Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble made the move from the Loyal Order of Dinosaurs to the Loyal Order of Buffalo!

The PIC quickly learned about the dynamic between leaders and followers. As we'll see, its 1912 catechism made such a precipitous leap from the "Loyal Order of Dinosaurs" to its new "Loyal Order of Buffalo," that they risked leaving behind hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Filipino Catholics in the "Loyal Order of Dinosaurs" that they loved and believed in. We want to be with people who believe what we believe—and within ten years of its founding, the 1912 PIC catechism would test the Filipino people's ability to follow a church that professed beliefs so different from their traditional Roman Catholic beliefs!

The PIC faced a delicate dance: It had to find ways to mirror the Roman Catholic Church from which it had split, so that people would

experience less cognitive dissonance in following the new church, but it also had a desire to innovate. It needed to retain the elements of the “Loyal Order of Dinosaurs” that its people wanted to retain. We all face this challenge: We do certain things that resemble the mainline religious traditions from which we come. I, for instance, dress like a Roman Catholic priest, I retain the title used by Roman Catholic priests, I celebrate a Roman Catholic liturgy, and I maintain several post-Vatican II Roman Catholic beliefs. In many ways, we resemble so many other Catholic churches! I also engage in the delicate dance of innovation and of working beliefs and practices that are brought to our community by traditional “cradle Catholics” – beliefs and practices that I might not choose myself. During our weekly bible study, for instance, I need to be keenly attuned to any cognitive dissonance that I create in the hearts and minds of others – so that I don’t find myself “taking a walk” alone!

Some of the things that we believe and practice as Inclusive Catholics cause cognitive dissonance for others. They notice our married clergy. They see our inclusion of women in the ordained ministries of the Church. They see our support of our LGBTQIA+ siblings. And this forces them to choose whether they’ll be part of the “Loyal Order of Dinosaurs” or our “Loyal Order of Buffalo”! It’s the same in politics: People must choose whether they’ll align themselves with “conservative” forces that seek stability and continuity, or with “progressive” forces that seek to push forward our society and our world.

More eloquently expressed, the question becomes: How do we maintain stability and continuity with a tradition, while simultaneously attempting to innovate? In their 2002 work, *Winning through Innovation*, Michael Tushman and Charles O’Reilly, III use the simple analogy of walking: When we walk, one foot is grounded and provides stability, while the other foot moves forward. In the 1912 catechism, we’ll see how the PIC stepped so far forward that it risked bringing instability to the entire church and it risked losing those whose paradigms and belief systems more resembled those of the “Loyal Order of Dinosaurs.” Hence, the corrective of Supreme Bishop de los Reyes, Jr. and others, who took a slight step back from the 1912 catechism.

A final note on context before we jump into the catechism. Recall that the autocratic Romanist Church had condemned modernity and modern science, setting itself against State and Science through Pio Nono’s 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* and the subsequent First Vatican Council of 1870. If Newton was correct in suggesting that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, we might see that reaction in the formation of the Old Catholic Church in Germany. German Catholics now had to choose:

Which “Loyal Order” would they be part of? Both “Orders” claimed to be the stabilizing force in the Church: Roman Catholics condemned Old Catholics as schismatics and heretics, while Old Catholics accused Romanists of creating a new church through its novel and treasonous heresies. Old Catholics just couldn’t follow the Church of Rome, which now stretched their ability to believe in the innovations that were being imposed on the People of God. The PIC split from the Romanist Church during this era, deciding to differentiate itself from the Roman Church by esteeming Science—always written with a capital S in this “catechism”—honoring its national peculiarity, and educating a “morally-virtuous, scientifically-intelligent and patriotic clergy”—a stated value of the 1871 Old Catholic Congress of Munich 40 years before the 1912 PIC catechism!

At our gathering in May, we noted how the PIC is a very patriotic church: singing the national anthem during liturgies, creating vestments in the colors of the Philippine flag, and creating a representation of Mary and her son with the characteristics of indigenous Filipinos. Today let’s look at the “scientifically-intelligent” church that the PIC sought to create.

As we open together the pages of the 1912 catechism of the Philippine Independent Church, remember that this catechism was published in Spanish and, to our knowledge, has never been translated to English. The following is our English translation of the work here at Holy Family. Ask yourself how comfortable and/or uneasy you are with each statement. Then step back in time and imagine what it would be like for a person in 1912 (110 years ago!) to hear the same words. If you were a Filipina or Filipino of that era, of whatever average education was possessed by them in that time and place, what would you think of each statement from the 1912 PIC catechism? What would you think of that church’s attempt to ground its faith in Science, rather than scripture and the traditional beliefs that had been handed down from generation to generation?

The 1912 catechism asks, “Thinking without prejudice, where can relative truth be found?” Notice the presence of that word, “relative”: the suggestion, aligned with modern philosophy, that there is no universal, objective truth! For centuries, the Roman Church claimed to possess absolute truth; here we see the suggestion that truth, rather, is relative. The catechism’s answer is simple: Truth is found “in free Science.” It continues by asking: “What do you understand by ‘free Science’?” The answer: “Science that is freely investigated and not hindered or obscured by dogmatisms that impede its development.” Think back to our

conversation on the First Vatican Council, which, due to the duress of the pope, was *not* free! In the same way that we might speak of a free council, here we're speaking of "free Science," free from dogmatism and obscurantism, free to develop on its own, as new information is discovered. This catechism makes clear from the very first two questions that it will ground all truth in Science! How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with that statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with that statement in 1912?

And now we step into deeper waters of controversy. The catechism asks: "Is it true that God first appeared to humankind to teach us God's will and how God had created us?" The answer: "We cannot believe this for many compelling reasons...Only the unbalanced see visions...The Bible participates in the puerile belief that God takes on human form." There are no religious visions! The divine does not take on human form! How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with that statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be in 1912?

The catechism continues: "Explain so-called Euhemerism" – and I'll admit even I had to look up that word.

When savage, isolated human beings began to gather in groups and tribes, they chose as chiefs or rulers those who were distinguished by their intelligence and courage. Naturally, when this ruler died, the ruler continued to rule over souls. From this came the idea of a God that was superior to all other gods. The word "God," *Tieos* in Indo-European languages, *Theos* in Greek, etc. come from the Chinese root *Ti*, which means nothing more than Sovereign. Since ancient times, Euhemerism advances that the first gods recorded in history, like Mithras, Zeus or Jupiter, Osiris, Horus, Belo, Brahma, Zoroaster, Tien, etc., originated as human rulers.

The human being created God, and not vice versa: Such language was as revolutionary as the PIC itself! How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with that statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with that statement in 1912?

What about belief in the Trinity? We noted at our gathering in May that Supreme Bishop Aglipay was unitarian, choosing to believe in one God and eschewing any Trinitarian belief, any belief in the traditional Christian Trinity of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer (or Father, Son and Holy Spirit, if you prefer). The catechism asks: "When and how did the belief in a Trinity of gods arise?" The answer:

It arose almost at the same time as the deification of rulers: Because rulers have spouses and children, the Queen and the Prince had to be gods along with the King. They became the “second-in-command” and intermediaries between the Sovereign and his subjects, just as they were in life. The most ancient civilizations testify to this: The *trimurti* of India consisted of Brahma, his wife Sara-vadi, and his son Vishnu. The Egyptian trinity was comprised of Osiris, his wife Isis, and his son Horus. The Babylonian trinity was formed by Belo, his wife Semiramis, and his son Nino. And there are other examples.

We stole the idea of the Trinity from ancient cultures! For this reason, Supreme Bishop Aglipay and the bishops who approved this catechism likely lost little sleep in eschewing belief in the Trinity. They were learning about the belief systems of ancient cultures. They were discovering that Jesus was not the first “god” to rise from the dead: This was a motif in all universal “grain god” myths, who—like kernels of grain—died, were buried and rose again. How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with such a statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such a statement in 1912?

What about the Christian belief in the incarnation, of God becoming flesh in Jesus of Nazareth? The Gospel of John clearly states: “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us” (Jn. 1:14). The 1912 catechism asks: “How did the idea of God progress?” The answer:

The idea of God progressed with the marvelous advances of the Science....Such an immense God, who fills all infinite space, cannot be enclosed in a sun, or in one or several solar systems. Instead, God is found in the limitless cosmos. It is even more impossible to imagine God being enclosed in a human being, beast, tree or mountain. For this reason, the great prophet Moses forbade fashioning images of God in the likeness of anything in heaven, on earth, or in the waters (Exodus 20:4).

God *cannot* become flesh. The Divine is something outside of the human person, something that could never “fit” inside the human person. How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with such a statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such a statement in 1912?

We say that God is omnipotent, and the Synoptic Jesus declared, “everything is possible for God” (Mk. 10:27, Mt. 19:26, Lk. 18:27). We



wonder: Can God make a square circle? Can God sin? The catechism asks: “Is God omnipotent?” The answer:

Perhaps, though we cannot assure this with certainty, we know that God is extremely powerful and above all things, but we have no proof that God can do the impossible on God’s own—for instance, that God could contradict the laws that God has dictated for the Universe, or that God could sin, which is something that God forbids.

Similar questions were raised during the Enlightenment: Can God perform “miracles” by violating or suspending the laws of the universe? How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with such a statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such a statement in 1912?

I could just as easily have asked: Can God perform “miracles” by violating or suspending the laws of the universe that God created? That, of course, would advance the view that God created the universe as it presently exists. Supreme Bishop Aglipay did not espouse a view of *creatio ex nihilo*, creation from nothing. His catechism asks: “So, are the universe and matter also eternal?” The answer:

Yes; it is necessary that matter be eternal, since it is the indispensable body and material of God for God’s prodigious activity and energy. The Maker gave original matter its many forms. We do not conceive of absolute creation, in the sense of creating something out of nothing, because nothing can be created out of nothing. The Bible itself does not say that God created the universe out of nothing, but rather that the universe already existed in the form of chaos, and that the Maker was limited to ordering that chaos (Gen. 1:2).

Such words overturn traditional concepts of *creatio ex nihilo*, the second-century cosmogony articulated by Plotinus. Step back before the second century and imagine the Divine in the act of ordering preexistent matter. How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with such a statement? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such a statement in 1912?

I like wrapping my mind around the next question: “How big is God?” The answer: “Just as we cannot imagine the limits of space, we cannot imagine the limits of the Divine. God is immense, infinite like space, and filling all things. Where there is space, God exists.” I wonder: Can the Divine not exist outside of space and time? We’ll keep going.

Supreme Bishop Aglipay returned to his views on the “imagined Trinity.” He asks: “And where did the imagined Trinity come from?” His answer:

When the Greeks mixed with the Christians, they grafted in Plato’s trinity, applying to Jesus the role of the Platonic Word, despite the fact that the sublime Master never referred to himself as the Word of God. The Holy Spirit was imagined as a dove, the symbol of Semiramis, who was worshiped in ancient times as the third person of the Assyrian trinity.

How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with the idea of an “imagined Trinity”? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such an idea in 1912?

But what does that mean for our baptisms – and all baptisms deemed valid by the Roman Catholic Church – in the name of the Trinity? Supreme Bishop Aglipay asks: “So, how should we understand Matthew 28:19, where Jesus orders his friends to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?” He answers:

This is evidently a later interpolation, since, according to the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles, they baptized only in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Even mathematics, which is the exact science *par excellence*, would be nothing more than a fantasy if it were to suggest that three is one, and one is three.

Imagine the consequence: The Roman Catholic Church of that era, using its own criteria for the “validity” of Catholic sacraments, could now condemn the baptisms of the Philippine Independent Church as “invalid”! I’m personally fond of the mathematical argument: Three can never be one, and one can never be three. Do you believe in one God, or do you believe in three or more gods? How comfortable and/or uneasy are you with the idea of baptizing in the name of Jesus? How comfortable and/or uneasy might traditional Filipino Catholics be with such an idea in 1912?

What about the afterlife? In the Catholic tradition, we talk about heaven and hell, and we know that purgatory (dating to around 1170) and limbo (coined around 1300) have crept into the conversation over time. The 1912 catechism asks: “What is known as the soul after death?” The answer is brief: “In reality, nothing is known about it, according to the Bible (Eccl. 3:22).”

What about ghosts? Do you believe in ghosts? The 1912 catechism asks, "Is it true that souls have been seen after their bodies have died?" The answer:

This is impossible! Only brains disturbed by madness, fasting or great nervous excitement could see such visions. Even if we brought a buried body back to life, it could not arise from the grave without the help of the living; and if the soul is a pure spirit, as claimed, it cannot appear in bodily form, for the simple reason that it lacks a body and the necessary organs for this. Scientifically-speaking, this is a great absurdity.

This catechism explicitly states what many of us now believe: There are no ghosts.

What about God appearing to Moses? God gave Moses the Law, right? The 1912 catechism asks, "Is it true that God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments?" The answer:

We have already said that the alleged appearance of God is a pure tale of infantile people. The truth is that ancient legislators, like Lycurgus, Moses and others, shared their decrees in the name of God, so that they would be obeyed by the people. In addition, Moses and other prophets believed in good faith that the good thoughts of people are inspired by God and must be true; for this reason, Moses was right to attribute to God the ten principal commandments, which were the very bases of all morality and religion in other peoples.

"The pure tale of infantile people"! Recall for a moment that all candidates for ordination in the PIC were expected to demonstrate knowledge of the contents of this catechism.

The 1912 catechism already excluded notions of God creating the world. Now it returns to the question of creation, asking, "How were all things created?" The answer: "As we have not yet witnessed anything that has come from nothing, we believe that, according to Genesis 1:2, God did not create anything, but instead developed prime matter." What a fascinating view of God and the world: That matter existed from eternity and was not created by a divine force.

The question naturally arises: Where did the earth come from? The 1912 catechism asks: "How was our world formed?" The lengthy response follows:

At the beginning of the current period of eternity, our Earth was part of an immense nebula, the Milky Way, which was later divided into stars, one of which is the Sun, from which, among other planets, a nebulous or gaseous ring condensed and formed the globe we inhabit. In this gaseous state, the Earth encompassed an area that reached beyond the Moon. As the Earth further condensed, it became a small star or sun with its own light and heat. Due to its small size, it soon cooled down, reaching 273 degrees below zero in some places; the vapors of the atmosphere condensed into murky, boiling waters that contained many dissolved materials, and the globe was covered with those tumultuous, hot waters. The cooling began to coagulate incandescent portions, forming the first crust of the Earth as the salt pans and sugar pylons crystallized on the surface. Since then, our star ceased to be luminous, becoming an opaque planet or body. The atmosphere is the remnant of its old nebula.

Had I read that paragraph in a different context, would you ever have guessed that those words came from a Catholic catechism written 110 years ago? This response is noteworthy for its mention so long ago of “the current period of eternity,” on this side of the “Big Bang” – a term that wouldn’t be coined for 20 more years after this catechism!

What about humankind? Remember that the PIC is appealing to science to ground its faith. It’s not going to look to the scriptures for answers regarding the origin of the human being. The 1912 catechism asks, “When did the human being emerge?” The response:

Based on flint and stones that were apparently carved by human beings, some authors suggest that the human being appeared a million years ago, during the Tertiary Age. Judging by the many remains of human industry that have been discovered in the layers of the earth that correspond to the Quaternary Period, there is no doubt that the human being already existed during that time, some 240,000 years ago.

Imagine the cognitive dissonance that such words might create for those who, as children, learned that all humanity can be traced back to a single set of human ancestors in a garden! Unlike any Roman Catholic catechism, this work shared the scientific views of its age. Supreme Bishop Aglípay and his bishops actively attempted to subvert the age-

old scriptural story of Adam and Eve, actively trying to replace such ancient stories with a new narrative.

Having answered the question of *when* humankind arose, the catechism now turns to similar questions: "How and where did the human race arise?" Its answer:

The great English thinker Thomas Henry Huxley demonstrates with an admirable scientific comparison that the anatomical differences that separate the human being from monkeys of our stature, such as the gorilla and the chimpanzee, "are weaker than the same differences between large and small monkeys." ...Just as small monkeys seem to have come from the transformation of lemurs, and just as little monkeys became larger monkeys, the human being could have come from the improvement and development of the latter. According to Haeckel, "the human race is a branch of the group of catarrhines (monkeys very similar to the human being); it developed in the ancient world from long-extinct monkeys of this group.

Darwinism in a catechism: We see just how revolutionary this work of faith was in its day! In fact, the catechism continues with an explicit mention of the English naturalist whose evolutionary biology had been shunned by the Roman Church for over 50 years: "What did Darwin think?" Its response:

Neither Darwin nor Haeckel said, nor could they say, that the human being descends from the anthropoid or great ape, but, just as the donkey, without being the son of the horse, could have descended from the same distant grandparents as the horse, so the human being and the great apes of today could have descended from common grandparents. A mute human being would be very similar to the great apes of today, though without a tail, so it is conceivable that one branch originated and became that of the human being, while another was stationary or degenerated into that of the monkeys.

So, of course, we're all wondering what this means for human dignity, right? Are we just some other animal? The 1912 PIC catechism continues: "Doesn't this lower the dignity of the human being, to suppose that we are the monkey's 'cousins'?" Its response:

In no way. Dignity is individual. A virtuous person will always be worthy of praise and admiration, even if she were

the daughter of a criminal, or of one with a defective or strange physique. Nor is the civilized considered disgraced because he proceeded from a savage people. The fidelity of dogs and the maternal love of birds will always be admired, no matter what animals they are, while mean people with criminal instincts will always be hated and considered as less than brutes.

I read in such words the beauty and dignity of God's creation, human and non-human alike!

What about scripture? We know that the Christian tradition has esteemed its sacred writings, and we also know that Supreme Bishop Aglípay was not looking to the scriptures for answers. He asks: "What does the Bible say?" He answers:

The Bible contains the very childish tale that likens God to a potter who formed a large clay doll, then blew in its nose, turning it into a human being. At first glance, this is very far-fetched, since we have not yet seen anything like this and, according to the Bible itself, what is happening now is also what happened in the past. Every day we see cases of transformation and of the creation of new varieties of animals and plants through pure chance or through combinations witnessed by people who understand this matter. We see varieties of dogs, and we note their resemblance to the wolf, indicating a community of origin. We see varieties of cats, and we note their resemblance to the tiger. We see varieties of oxen and horses, and we see, finally, the human being that is very similar to the great apes.

Again, this catechism, written in 1912, was trying to faithfully interpret the world in which its readers found themselves.

Listen carefully to the catechism's answer to this question: "What else does Genesis say about creation?" The simple answer: "Other great errors, which modern Science denies. They are refuted one-by-one in our *Philippine Bible*." Only the first two-thirds of the *Philippine Bible* are publicly available online at present; I've skimmed the work, which is entirely fascinating and not too different from what we're reading here.

With its characteristically-scientific perspective, the catechism returns to the question of heaven: "How were the ideas of Heaven and Paradise born?" Its answer:

As the ancients believed that the soul—the shadow or the invisible person—survives the dead person, they believed that the shadows of good people would inhabit depopulated mountains and forests. These secluded places were the paradises of the primitive peoples. As they began to learn astronomy and turned their human gods into stars, they naturally moved their paradise from the mountains and forests, to the sky or firmament above. Primitive people believed that the dead would continue with the same occupations that they had in life, served by the shadows of their slaves and animals, since these too have souls, and eating the shadows of food, since ancient people also believed that each food possesses a “soul,” which is its substance or flavor. When people moved the place of their gods to heaven, they also believed that the souls of animals and birds would continue to serve the holy people there who had become gods.

It’s evident how the message of the emerging PIC might conflict with the traditional teachings of the church in which many Aglipayans were raised! Think of the “people in the pews,” with their upbringing, education and ways of looking at our world: Imagine them hearing from their priests the responses of this new catechism. Imagine them hearing that heaven and hell were ideas invented by human beings like themselves. Imagine the cognitive dissonance!

What about angels? We have many people within the Catholic faith who believe in angels, and we have others within our faith who may be more aware of the history of the idea of angels. The 1912 PIC catechism asks: “Should we believe in the existence of angels?” Its blunt answer:

No. Genesis states that God made the sky with its stars, sun and moon, and the earth with its plants, fish, birds, animals and humans; but it does not say that God created hell, purgatory, limbo, angels, demons. All those fantasies of Persian Zoroastrianism appeared only about a thousand years after the death of Moses, the alleged author of Genesis, when they were grafted into the Bible by Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra and other Jews educated in Persia, as evidenced by the fact that all the names of the angels—like Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, etc.—are Persian. The ancient books of the Bible speak of messengers, and since “angel” also means “messenger,” they turned all ancient human messengers into

spiritual angels. Science shows that there is no spirit without matter, and no matter without spirit or hidden energy.

These words must have been difficult to “swallow” for all who had images of angels, archangels and guardian angels hanging in their homes! Many of us would likely want to be careful before sharing such a paragraph with the member of our communities – though such sharing would no doubt lead to a very robust conversation on the beliefs we have inherited!

We can all imagine the catechism’s views on hell. We’ve already heard it state that hell is a fantasy from Persian Zoroastrianism. It now asks: “How was the idea of hell born?” Its extended response follows:

Since primitive human beings believed in the shadows or souls of evildoers and enemies, they thought that the volcanoes, the mountains that vent and vomit the internal fire of the earth, are the roasters and dungeons of evil souls. It is absurd, though, to think that a most merciful Father would condemn children to eternal fire after having paid for their sins through death. It is no less absurd to believe that a spirit can be burned by a material fire in Hell. What is called “Sheol” in the Bible was the sepulcher or town of the dead, like the fabled Mount Kilang of the Ilocanos and Mount Púlad of the Igorots of Benguet. Sheol later became the hell of the idolatrous worshipers of Moloch, a valley to the west of Jerusalem, where idolaters burned their children in honor of Moloch. In Greece, it became Hades, the invisible prison of souls, and in Rome it became the “deep place” of Inferno. According to the Bible, sins are punished in this life (Prov. 11:31), and the idea of a hell in the afterlife is exotic and pagan. The biblical proofs of this are found in paragraphs 56, 57 and 58 of our *Philippine Gospel*.

Think of the scholarship that went into this catechism! And imagine unpacking these statements to believers in 1912!

Knowing what the work says about angels, we can imagine what it will say about demons. If there’s no angel sitting on one shoulder, is there a devil sitting on the other? It asks, “Are there demons?” It answers:

No. The temptations to evil that we feel are instincts, natural imperfections, or defects of education. In all cases, they are of our own nature and are not of an imaginary devil that no one has seen, except those who are unbalanced or highly excited



by nerves. Genesis does not say that God created the devil, nor could God have created such a repugnant being whose only occupation is ensuring the loss of souls.

That response is quite profound. The idea of the devil and of demons is so deeply rooted in the Christian and Catholic imagination. All of us can picture the devil, according to the artistic representations we've seen: with red skin, a beard and horns, with a tail and the feet of a satyr, holding a pitchfork. How could a good and loving God create such a being "whose only occupation is ensuring the loss of souls"? I encourage us all to do a quick search of "Satan," "devil" and "demon" on Wikipedia, to understand the origins of such ideas.

What about original sin? We can imagine the response. In the 1912 catechism, it's sandwiched into another response on one of two limbos: the "limbo of the just" and infant limbo. The catechism asks, "What is the limbo of the just or the 'bosom of Abraham'?" Look for the reference to original sin in the following answer:

According to the Romanists, it was a detention prison for the righteous dead, a theory invented to confirm the novelty that Jesus was the only one who could save us from imaginary "original sin," something that the divine Master never mentioned nor suggested that he would redeem us from. What is recorded in the Gospel is a story of Jesus sharing an example of how selfish people who do not know how to sympathize with the poor would not be admitted to the place of saints like Abraham. This "bosom of Abraham" appeared as a place of consolation, an ancient Paradise – but the just do not deserve hell, so there is no limbo.

Of course, the 1912 PIC catechism addresses the traditional concept of Purgatory as well. It asks: "What is Purgatory?" It answers:

Purgatory is another department of the fabled hell, where souls go to be purged of their sins—in such a brutal way, according to Romanists, that the thief is burned for an unspecified number of days, and that relatives can offer masses and acquire indulgences to rescue such souls. Purgatory was invented to exploit the gullible and was only approved by the Council of Florence in 1439. The Bible says nothing of Purgatory. To the contrary, Jesus warns that priests who, under the pretext of long prayers, swallow the houses of widows will deserve more serious punishment (Mt. 23:11).

Purgatory is an outrage to the justice and mercy of God, who is the loving Father of all, both the good and the bad.

Supreme Bishop Aglípay has already told us that nothing is known of the soul after death. He returns to the theme, asking, “What is the human being after death?” His answer:

As Ecclesiastes 3:22 says, no one knows. We only know that the material part remains on earth, according to its various components, and its energy remains in the atmosphere. God will always do what is best: Thinking sensibly, it would be better that we are reunited with our loved ones, not that we disappear forever with no other ulterior motive, which seems inadmissible, because God only acts for permanent purposes. We see that everything endlessly evolves and develops. When people die, then, their spirit or energy evaporates and returns to the spiritual atmosphere, to the principle or reservoir of life, energy, electricity, magnetism, etc. – to the Universal Force, to God!

What I love about this rather profound and spiritually-mature response is the PIC’s attempt to affirm human destiny without an appeal to reified notions of heaven and hell.

Supreme Bishop Aglípay continues with the following question: “Do the dead go into nothingness or into eternal rest?” His extended answer:

Because rest does not fit with the activity of the Supreme Maker, which is the sum of all energy and activity, the dead will likely go to another higher life. This is certainly the most consistent possibility with our feelings, which are often the inspiration of God. We apparently become dust, but that dust, as Schopenhauer says, “will very soon dissolve in water, which will become crystal and shine with the brilliance of metals, producing electric sparks, manifesting its magnetic power... to model itself on plants and animals, and to finally develop in its mysterious bosom that life whose loss so torments your limited spirit. Matter is indestructible. Although the individual dies as a passing modality, humanity subsists. When Nature, that sovereign and universal mother, unscrupulously exposes her children to a thousand imminent risks, knowing that by succumbing, they fall back into her bosom, where she holds them hidden. Their death is nothing

more than a frolic, a romp, and they are as indifferent to death as to life.

How entirely unique to find Arthur Schopenhauer, an existentialist philosopher, in a Catholic catechism! And did you hear those words: "As indifferent to death as to life"? For those familiar with Jesuit spirituality, I hear notes of Ignatian indifference here.

Knowing that y'all will be running to get your own copy of this catechism when we publish it in English and in Spanish, I'll allow you to explore the other contents of this work.

I'll conclude here with four final questions concerning the end times. The Book of Revelation paints the fantastic picture of a great cosmic battle, where all whose names are written in the Book of Life stand before God and the triumphant Lamb, where they witness a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 19-21). Is that what happens at the end? Aglípay asks, "Will the universe ever end?" He answers: "No. It will only suffer partial 'deaths' or transformations, for there is no true death. The Earth, with our entire solar system, will surely die, but it will be reborn again, and the same is true of other worlds and solar systems."

"What will the end of our world be like?"

The great physicist William Thomson calculates that in another 17 million years the Sun will have condensed, as the Earth has, precipitating its absolute cooling or death within 18 million years, a period that Camille Flammarion extends to 20 or 30 million years. The end must inevitably come, like a furnace that has consumed all its fuel.

"And the Earth?"

The Earth will have died long before. Our planet will go extinct when the Sun stops warming it enough for it to live. As the light and heat of the star dim, animal and plant life will withdraw to the equatorial regions of the Earth, the only possible place to live, until finally everything will die of cold, even before the light of the Sun is completely extinguished.

"What will happen when the Sun goes completely extinct?"

The decomposition of the Sun and the extinct planets will quickly happen. Death implies dissolution, and, just as granite turns into light dust, our entire solar system, like consumed coal, will be reduced to ashes. Then, all the energies apparently lost by those extinct bodies will have

actually passed, in the form of electricity, heat, hydrogen, etc., to the spaces through which our solar system will have circulated, and they will then contribute to the formation of a new nebula.

Two words: Mind blown. 110 years ago, this Catholic catechism, as approved by the Supreme Council of Bishops of the largest manifestation of Independent Catholicism, provided its readers—clergy and laity alike—a very different perspective of our faith and of our world. Rather than wage a war against science and culture, it embraced and blessed them. I am reminded of my studies with the Jesuits at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri many years ago: The most mystical course that I took there was a course in astronomy, which blew my mind with a universe that is some  $10 \pm 5$  billion years old, a universe that is expanding but will one day collapse in on itself until all the matter of the universe could fit onto a teaspoon, thus precipitating the next “Big Bang.” That’s seemingly the sort of universe that Supreme Bishop Aglipay and those closest to him embraced 110 years ago!

We can also imagine the angst and cognitive dissonance that this catechism must have inspired in 1912. For “the people in the pews,” it was a step too far, thus necessitating a corrective and resulting in a church today that doesn’t differ so greatly from the Roman Catholic Church of the Philippines—apart from the details that it possesses in common with many Inclusive Catholic clergy and communities in the U.S. The Philippine Independent Church stretched the “rubber band” of Catholic faith, but, for various reasons, it returned to a state that more closely resembles the church from which many of its adherents originally came.

The revolutionary catechism of a revolutionary church admittedly overreached the limits of its followers, stepping too far and nearly toppling an entire church, but that church reclaimed its stability and forged an identity that is still amenable to as many as six to eight million people today!

**Reflections on  
A Revolutionary Catechism  
of a Revolutionary Church**

- Quintana: Biblical eschatology talks about “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), so those closing answers certainly don’t bother my faith at all. We have to realize that, as modern-day Catholics, we have moved far beyond biblical literalism. Our creation story is part of our “mythology,” and the Bible is filled with metaphor, imagery and allegory that we don’t need to understand literally. On the other hand, many of our scientific theories are just that: theories! None of us was present at the beginning of the world. None of us knows exactly what happened!
- Mathias: Well said. Stay tuned: Soon you’ll be able to read this 1912 catechism in its entirety. It contains many sections that we were not able to address during this limited time – including its understanding of the seven sacraments!
- Robison: As I hear the contents of this catechism, many of the ideas come straight from the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who attempted to turn scientism into a sacramental system. He built churches dedicated to the Great Idea, a sort of deified human and partly pantheistic idea of God. Cultural anthropologists would consider a lot of the other stuff to be outdated now, particularly the elements that come from *The Golden Bough* and the Theosophists – and you can’t get “trinities” from those ancient religions without doing violence to them. All of these ideas were very popular among a certain set of intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals at the beginning of the 20th century – and many of them are now burned-out ideas. Nothing surprises me about this catechism, except for the sophisticated way in which they manipulated all these things together. This was state-of-the-art pseudo-intellectual spirituality! And it’s now out of date. Science no longer says that we form new nebulae. These were certainly ideas of their time, neither surprising nor interesting.
- Green: This was fascinating, and I appreciate the new insights. I look forward to reading the entire catechism. I studied at Andover Newton Theological School, and we were

encouraged to stretch ourselves and read these kinds of catechisms. We were taught that a mature faith does not feel threatened by these things, but rather that these things evoke something in us, prompting us to continuously evaluate our faith. I'm currently watching "The Expanse," which imagines the worlds of the future: When they wrote this catechism, they were using the science and technology they had, and they were imagining the future. Imagine if this catechism were rewritten in 2022: What would people's reaction be to it 100 or 200 years from now? This entire conversation calls me to a deepening of my faith.

Mathias: I was surprised to see that this catechism quotes existentialist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer at length. During my philosophical studies, I was absolutely taken by his existentialist thought. This catechism attempted to pull together such "contemporary" ideas. I, too, like to imagine: What would it look like if we, too, were to write a similar catechism now nearly a quarter of the way through the 21st century? In light of contemporary thought and presuming that it simply wouldn't be a regurgitation of the past, like so many other catechisms, what might such a work say about scripture and Catholic tradition today?

Božek: It's important to remember, as you pointed out today, that every action has a reaction. This catechism needs to be read in the context of the political and theological revolution taking place in the Philippines. The Roman Catholic Church was the church of the evil Spanish empire, and it was despised, so this catechism was a political and theological reaction to that context of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Philippines, when the *Syllabus Errorum* was still in force. Every bishop, priest and deacon had to swear obedience to the *Syllabus* of Pope Pius IX! Many of us may have taken the same extremely anti-modernist oath when we were ordained as well. That anti-modernism spirit is alive and well in the Roman Church. While the Roman Church was condemning evolution, science and modernism in every single sermon and in every single church, the Philippine Independent Church, which had escaped colonialism and imperialism, was now creating a catechism that embraced modernism. It embraced Schopenhauer and Darwin. They, in effect, "gave the finger" to the Roman Church, saying, "We will try to

reconcile our faith with modern science!” This catechism was a very impressive and courageous attempt to bridge the gap that was extremely prominent in the Roman Church and was deepened by Pius IX. The language is dated and seems awkward to us, as John points out, but, as Tony points out, people will likely read our conversations 100 years from now and laugh at us and make jokes about us as well! Language is always dated. I’m impressed with their courageous and radical attempt to create a bridge between Christian faith and modern science as it was known to them.

- Mathias: This catechism is prefaced by a 26-page salvo written by a Spanish priest who was expelled from the Roman Catholic Church. From the start, he makes clear that this work speaks of a very different religion, one worthy of admiration throughout the world.
- L. Walker: Absolutely bold and fascinating, for sure! What a bold and innovative church it must have taken to attempt to reconcile science and the Catholic faith. I’m curious: Did they write another catechism in the late 1940s? If so, did they throw everything out? What is their catechism like today?
- Mathias: That’s an excellent question. We’ll have to pull in our friends from the Philippines for that answer. I’m not aware of any catechism published by the PIC after 1912. As part of our research for *Aglipayan* in 2020, we found no online evidence of any past or current catechism since that work of 1912. We know what they veered *from*; the corpus is less clear about what they veered *to* in order to achieve union with the Anglican Communion and the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches.
- L. Walker: Do you interpret the lack of response to your inquiries as some embarrassment on their part to be associated with us?
- Mathias: I don’t. I’m willing to “cut them some slack.” We had allowed them this time to brag on themselves, and Father Nixon was certainly supportive of the idea three weeks ago. I wouldn’t want us to misinterpret their lack of response since then.
- Turner: What this catechism says about dignity really made me mad. It seems like they’re blaming those who believe in angels and demons of mental weakness. I was not brought up thinking

that this is a mental weakness. Of course, back then they didn't understand psychiatry the way we do nowadays.

Mathias: We certainly have to be mindful of the vocabulary that we use when we discuss our Catholic faith with others. As I had suggested earlier, the things that we teach and preach can cause cognitive dissonance in the minds of our listeners. If I've believed in angels and demons my whole life, and then I read this book from 1912 that suggests that they might be human creations, that may cause me a great deal of cognitive dissonance. We're always trying to reconcile what we see and hear with those things that we believe – and it creates a fascinating dynamic!

Leary: From a historical perspective, just imagine where the Filipino people were: They had just come through the Spanish-American War, and the imperialism of Spain was replaced by the United States. They were also fighting against the pope and imperial Rome. Amid that whole uproar, they were taught to believe that they were subservient, that they weren't completely human! That must have had an influence on how they perceived what they were living through. Now they had an opportunity to go out on their own, to create something: their own catechism! Maybe it was a reach too far, but the Filipino people were creating their own church, a place that they could call their own and where they could feel at home. We can't look at this catechism in a vacuum. It was a remarkable step! Do I agree with everything in it? Absolutely not. But considering where they were coming from, they are to be applauded. Those elements that challenge us and don't quite square with what we've learned: Those things should cause us to reflect on our own context and our own historical backgrounds!

Mathias: I appreciate you highlighting the importance of context, Father Paul. This catechism was written in 1912. Today, we can search the internet for anything, and we can go down any number of "rabbit holes" and learn all sorts of things. I'm imagining many of us are old enough to remember the card catalogs that we had in our libraries. If we wanted to learn in an age before the internet, we had to use key words to track down the right books, then we had to page through those books. I'm quite stunned by the intellectual resources



involved in pulling together a catechism like this—in the years preceding 1912! That, to me, is incredible. I bow my head in the direction of our Philippine sisters and brothers who pulled together this work!

**The Advent of Old Catholicism in the U.S.:  
A Conversation on Joseph René Vilatte**

Rev. Mike Lopez

Mathias: After our initial keynote by Bishop John Plummer, we've start working through time, beginning with the birth of Independent Catholicism in Utrecht in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Then we skipped ahead to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the 1871 Old Catholic Congress in Munich and the 1872 Old Catholic Congress in Cologne in 1872. Last night, we discussed the nascent Philippine Independent Church, and almost concurrently we saw the birth of the Polish National Catholic Church, which we'll discuss this evening with Father Marek. Let's pause and reflect on the advent of "Old Catholicism" – or what we refer to today as Independent Catholicism – in the United States. And that brings us to today's presenter, Father Mike Lopez of All Saints Priory in Ridgewood, Queens, New York!

Lopez: Thank you. This is our eighth year here at the priory, as a Benedictine community associated with the House of *Initia Nova* of the Episcopal Church. Since the beginning of our community, we have identified as an Old Catholic community here in America. Today I'll be working off of two documents penned by Joseph René Vilatte: his 1890 work, *A Sketch of the Belief of the Old Catholics in the Americas*, which he wrote in response to those who questioned his work as an "Old Catholic" in the Americas, and his 1893 work, *An Encyclical to All Bishops Claiming To Be of the Apostolic Succession*, refuting the position of the Episcopal Church's 1892 Assembly. Before we start, let's see what we already know about Vilatte. What are some of the things that you already know about Joseph René Vilatte?

Smith: I'm fairly new to the movement, but I believe Vilatte was from France and had a falling out with the Roman Church and with the Old Catholic Church, and he then came to Canada, then to the United States.

Newbauer: Among others, he is credited as one of the founders of our church, the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. He settled in Wisconsin, where he had a falling out with the

Episcopal bishop. He sought some refuge in the Russian Orthodox Church in San Francisco, but that fell through, so he ended up going to Ceylon, where he was consecrated a bishop. My understanding is that he enjoyed a good relationship with the patriarch of the Syriac Church for a while, but then that fell off for some reason—possibly because there wasn't enough money coming from him, or because the patriarch didn't want to have anyone here in this country. Vilatte participated in the founding of various churches, consecrating various bishops. If I'm not mistaken, he ended up in a Cistercian monastery in France, where he lived the last years of his life.

D'Arrigo: I understand that Vilatte was the first person whom we might consider to be an "Independent Catholic" here in the United States. He identified with the ideals of Americanism and democracy, so, for instance, he believed in the freedom of the Church. He holds a special place in bringing the Old Catholic Church or Independent Catholicism to the U.S., and it's important that we understand him within the context of this country.

Quintana: He was involved in the Episcopal Church, which would be the only way that we would ever be united with Utrecht. Toward the end of his life, he reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church, so he may not be an example to us in that respect. Peter Anson wrote a great chapter on Vilatte in his work, *Bishops At Large*.

Lopez: Vilatte was a Frenchman born in Paris in 1854. His parents belonged to *La Petite Église*, a schismatic Catholic community that was displeased with the Roman Church after the French Revolution, so he was part of an independent community from an early age. His mother died soon after he was born, so he was raised in an orphanage by the Christian Brothers. When they heard that he was baptized in *La Petite Église*, they subconditionally rebaptized him in 1867. From an early age, he experienced the tension between independent Catholicism and the Roman Church! After the Franco-Prussian War, he traveled as a Roman Catholic catechist to Canada, where he lived and studied with the Christian Brothers. He eventually returned to France, where he discovered that he was going to be drafted into the army, so

he fled to Belgium, where he sought refuge again with the Christian Brothers. Feeling a vocation to the priesthood, he left the Christian brothers, joined a diocesan seminary, and returned to Canada in 1876. He was a draft dodger, and he bounced around, like Tigger in Winnie the Pooh! In Canada, Vilatte joined the Holy Cross Fathers and studied with them for three years in Saint-Laurent, Montreal. He then met Charles Chiniquy, a former Roman Catholic priest turned Presbyterian minister who convinced Vilatte to leave the Roman Church and enter the Presbyterian Church. Vilatte became a Presbyterian minister but eventually decided to again reconcile himself with the Roman Church, this time entering the Clerics of St. Viator in Bourbonnais, Illinois, which was largely mission territory at the time for the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church. There was a real missionary spirit here in the U.S., and he soon learned about the great needs of the Franco-Belgian people who had escaped Europe and were now settling in northeastern Wisconsin. Some of them were familiar with European Old Catholicism, and they needed a priest, so Chiniquy introduced Vilatte to Old Catholicism. Knowing that he needed to associate himself with the Episcopal Church in order to be recognized by Utrecht, Vilatte spoke with Episcopal Bishop John Brown of Fond du Lac, informing the bishop of his desire to serve the people as an Old Catholic priest. Bishop Brown supported Vilatte's work and advocated for ordination by the Union of Utrecht. Vilatte was ordained a deacon and priest by Bishop Eduard Herzog of Bern, Switzerland, and he returned to the U.S. with the hope of founding a diocese of Old Catholics in the U.S., with the support of the Episcopal Church. This dynamic continues to play out today—even in my own ministry here in New York City. On June 5, 6 and 7, 1885, Vilatte was successively ordained to the subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood. In 1888, Bishop Brown, who had financially supported Vilatte, passed away, and he was succeeded by Bishop Charles Grafton, who did not favor Vilatte. Conflicts quickly arose. Bishop Grafton demanded that Father Vilatte surrender ownership of all missions that were financially supported by the diocese. In 1890, he surrendered twelve ministries in small towns and hunting and fur trapping outposts. The relationship between Grafton

and Vilatte quickly deteriorated. Money was an issue. The other issue was that the Episcopalians thought that Vilatte spent too much of his time trying to proselytize Roman Catholics into his Old Catholic expression. Vilatte ministered to French-speaking Catholics in the diaspora in much the same way that the Philippine Independent Church ministers to all sorts of Filipinos – including Roman Catholics – here in New York City. Bishop Grafton eventually asked Vilatte to fully join the Episcopal diocese, even luring him with the offer of serving as a suffragan bishop. Vilatte worried, though, that this would lead to severed ties with his Franco-Belgian congregants. Like the Old Catholic Church at that time, he was also concerned about the validity of Anglican orders. In the midst of this mess, Vilatte reached out to Utrecht with the request that they accept him as an individual priest and raise him to the episcopate, so that he could create an Old Catholic diocese in the United States. As a result, there was a real conversation on whether the Union of Utrecht would establish a diocese in North America – until the Episcopal Church made clear to the Union of Utrecht that it would no longer support Vilatte in any way if he were consecrated an Old Catholic bishop. Vilatte did not have the patience to wait for a decision by the Old Catholic Congress; instead, he turned to the Russian Orthodox Church. In search of support, Vilatte communicated with Bishop Vladimir Sokolovsky of San Francisco and Alaska, while simultaneously trying to negotiate with the Roman Church. Bishop Grafton learned of this and asked all Episcopalians to end their support of Vilatte. He also demanded that Vilatte close down all his “Old Catholic” missions in the diocese. In 1890, Vilatte wrote in his work, *A Sketch of the Belief of the Old Catholics*, that he was severing his relationship with the Episcopal Church and that he had founded a new mission in the Diocese of Green Bay. The concept of the *episcopus vagans* is not new: Here we see Vilatte wandering all over the place and communicating with several people of several traditions in an age before telephone and internet! In 1891, the Russian Orthodox Church received Vilatte as a mission priest in central North America, and the Episcopal Church, Roman Church and Old Catholic Church no longer wanted anything to do with him. At the same time, Vilatte was communicating with former

Roman Catholic priests who served as missionaries in British India. One of these former priests, William “Augustine de Angelis” Harding told Vilatte that he should seek episcopal consecration from the Goan Catholic Church, a Syro-Malabar church that had just separated itself from the Roman Catholic Church. Vilatte wasn’t consecrated by the Russian Orthodox Church, perhaps because it didn’t want conflicts with the local Episcopal Church, but he found a favorable response from Antonio Francisco Xavier “Mar Julius” Álvares of the Goan Church. On May 29, 1892, with the permission of the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, Álvares consecrated Vilatte in Ceylon as Mar Timotheus I, not as a Jacobite bishop of the Syro-Malabar rite, but as the first Jacobite Old Catholic bishop of North America. In all this, Vilatte desired to remain “Old Catholic,” and he sought episcopal consecration as a patriarch for “Old Catholics” in America. The Episcopal Church excommunicated Vilatte. When he later sought reunification (again) with the Roman Catholic Church, the question was raised of whether he was called to the episcopate by a particular people, community or church. Vilatte continued with his ministry. Before we proceed with his 1890 *Sketch*, let’s pause for questions.

L. Walker: I pastored a German community in the Diocese of Green Bay, which was established in 1854 by the Roman Catholic Church, so I was deeply embedded in the immigrant communities that arose in that mission territory around the time of Vilatte. There were a lot of small-town, ethnic communities that were founded during that period. That’s also where I went to seminary, so I was deeply rooted in the German history of the Diocese of Green Bay—but I didn’t know anything about the French communities there.

Lopez: I’ve been a fan of Vilatte for a number of years. I was a protégé of Bishop Peter Paul Brennan, a great friend and mentor, who often spoke of Vilatte and his importance in the movement. I hold Bishop Brennan dearly in my heart, and I actually had the honor of giving him the last rites during his final days. He was a pioneer in our movement during these past 50 years. Like Vilatte, he was a really ecumenically-minded guy, involved in so many movements. Bishop Brennan always spoke highly of Vilatte and used a chalice that was believed to be used by Bishop Vilatte. That’s how I

came to learn about Vilatte, his mindset, and his pioneering spirit in the Independent movement. In 1890, in response to his need to defend himself as an Old Catholic in the U.S. — remember that he was validly ordained by Herzog — Vilatte wrote a pamphlet titled *A Sketch of the Belief of the Old Catholics*. In the preface, he wrote:

We published this little pamphlet to satisfy the numerous demands of persons who put us to question: “Who are you, and what do you believe?” By doing so, we bear in mind the injunction of St. Peter, to “be always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us” (1Pet. 3:15). These few pages are but a concise resumé, necessarily imperfect, of our faith. But it is, we think, sufficient to demonstrate that we are as far removed from Protestantism on one hand, as we are from Romanism on the other—in a word, that we are Catholics without any other qualifications.

I find that so deep. The first time I read these words, I remember feeling a tremendous spirit of joy and *esprit de corps*. As a “lifer” in the Roman Church, with my formation in the Roman Church, I wasn’t sure about this movement when I first entered it. Vilatte speaks to my heart: “We are Catholics without any other qualifications.” We just are! Vilatte shares a historical view of the Church, created at Pentecost, when the Apostles were endowed with power and authority, and he objects to Peter alone being “the holder of the keys” (Mt. 16:19). “Although undoubtedly Christ said to Peter, ‘Oh Peter, thou art Rock, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.’” Peter was “the oracle of the Holy Spirit on that occasion” and “the creator of the apostolic college,” but Vilatte denies Peter being the first pope. He continues:

We are called Old Catholics because we have returned to the catholicity of scriptural and primitive times, but Catholicism is neither old nor new. Rather, it is ever old and ever new. For us, the pope of Rome is neither the source nor the unique channel of authority in the Church of God. The pope holds the authority from the Church, not the Church from the pope. The scriptures and the history of the Church show that sovereignty

resides not at the whim of any chief, but in the entire Church, in the will of the Christian community, and that the government of the Church ought to be democratic. This was the principle which animated the Catholic Church of Holland when she began her conflict with the courts of Rome. She was determined never to yield her ancient rights and privileges into the hands of the bishop of Rome. For nearly 200 years, she had validly combated for her liberties, and we cannot believe but that God will reward her for our fidelity and that the ancient archbishopric of Utrecht will obtain to consideration and dignity hitherto unknown. We, in America, her children, by reasonable apostolic ministry derived from her, remain true to the ancient faith she so zealously guards and transmits.

Even prior to being consecrated as a bishop, Vilatte wrote this pamphlet and made clear that he intended to be an Old Catholic priest in the United States. He had no intention to separate from the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht and her sister churches. He was very clear about his identity as a priest. He continues:

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1870, the churches of Germany and Switzerland have felt constrained to act in a similar way by rejecting the pretensions of the papacy.... Consequently, they do not recognize the supremacy of divine institution, nor the infallibility of the bishop of Rome. Neither do we attribute to him any power superior to that possessed by other bishops.

Smith: I understand that we're not Protestants or Roman Catholics or Old Catholics *per se*. There are some fringe groups in our movement, and I'm wondering if such groups influenced his decision to go back to the Roman Church.

Lopez: This next pamphlet may shed some light on that. In his preface and historical introduction, he rejects the papacy, then he continues with various theological and ecclesiological points from the Old Catholic tradition, and he addresses various points that were upheld by various traditions within Holy Mother Church at the time. It can be harmful and dangerous for us to self-identify as Old Catholics, as a matter of personal preference and as a means



of differentiating ourselves from Rome, or if we don't really understand the ecclesiology, theology and sociology of the Church of Utrecht. Prior to the Old Catholic Church affirming the LGBT community and calling women to ordained ministry, there were fewer differences in belief and practice between Roman Catholics and Old Catholics. Vilatte was very clear in letting people know that he was not a Roman Catholic priest, and that he was an Old Catholic priest. He rejected the papacy, thus aligning himself with the anti-papist movement here in the U.S.—which was ingrained in Americans since the revolution—and with the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, as they called themselves then. He wanted people to understand that, even though he was not a Roman Catholic priest, he was a duly-ordained priest, validly ordained by the Old Catholic Church and ministering in connection with the Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac.

L. Walker: I appreciate your emphasis on the fact that he was ordained to serve a people; he wasn't interested in becoming a bishop just for his own sake.

Lopez: Keep this in mind as we read his encyclical, where he addresses other bishops' opinions about his episcopacy: The Episcopal bishop of Fond du Lac could have ordained him; instead, they sent him to Bern, Switzerland, for him to be ordained by the Old Catholic Church, to serve Old Catholics in America! And the Jacobite bishops who consecrated him did so knowing that he would not serve as an Oriental Orthodox bishop: They consecrated him as the Jacobite Old Catholic bishop of North America! They did not send him back to the U.S. as a Jacobite bishop, but as an Old Catholic bishop! In his encyclical, he points out that the people called him to the episcopacy. Vilatte goes on to break down how his church is a true church: They believed in scripture as God's inspired Word, in the creeds—the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed—and in the first seven ecumenical councils of the undivided Church. He continues:

We believe that the sacraments of the new dispensation are not merely sacred signs that represent grace to us, nor the seal of that which is confirmed in us, but they are the instruments of the Holy Spirit, which apply and

confirm grace upon us in virtue of the words pronounced and the act performed upon us from without, providing we do not raise any obstacle by our own bad disposition. We receive an acknowledged baptism as the sacrament established by Christ to cleanse us from original sin and make us Christians. We believe that the bishop is the ordinary minister of confirmation, and that in the sacrament, the Holy Spirit is given with the fullness of the gifts: "For they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, then the apostles lay their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17). Confirmation is imparted by priests at the vigil of Pentecost or in extreme necessity. We believe that it pleased Jesus Christ to give his Church the authority to pardon those who have broken the law of the gospel after baptism, and that every priest validly ordained has the power and the merits of the person of Christ. "Whosoever's sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whoever's sins you retain shall be retained." Reconciliation or common absolution is granted by the priests at the beginning of every liturgy, after the *confiteor*.

How many of our communities offer general absolution at the beginning of mass? Though somewhat questioned by the Roman Church, this practice has its roots in the ancient Church. Vilatte continues:

We profess that the Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a sacrament. It is the unbloody sacrifice of the mass, which is the central rite and most essential act of public worship the Christian owes to God. Liturgy ought to be said in the language understood by the people.

Vilatte was definitely ahead of his times: He was asserting this in the 1890s! He continues: "We believe the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist is truly and really the Body of Christ. We affirm that the Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the laity." This was way before Vatican II!

We believe and hold Extreme Unction to be the sacramental dispensation instituted for the spiritual and corporal solace of the sick. We believe that Holy

Orders are a sacrament which confers upon the [person] the power to extend several functions of the ministry. Bishops are the ordinary ministers of the sacrament. The Catholic Church makes a distinction between the minor orders and the greater or holy orders.

At the time, the Church was still using seven minor orders. After the sacrament of Marriage, he continues:

The visible Church of Christ is a society in which the faithful are joined together by the profession of the same faith, with Jesus Christ as the head and source of all sanctity. We believe that the episcopate is necessary for the life of the Church, as the breath is for the life of a person, that is the common center of unity and the guardian of the positive divine revelation, that bishops are equal in power and authority by divine right, and that to them belongs a duty of defending the true and holy Catholic traditions, to the end that the whole Church, being united under their guidance, may ever be one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, the Father of all, who is above all and over all. Old Catholics recognize the religious orders and religious life as a source of strength and benediction not to be neglected, but to be cherished and developed among the children of God. The life of sacrifice and of super-eminent love towards God and people, which characterized the apostles, ought to be entertained by elect souls in the Church, chosen by the Holy Spirit, for free-will oblation of self upon the altar of charity. We emphatically deny the accusation of our separated brothers, who pretend that Catholics adore the image of Christ, the Blessed Mother and the saints. We venerate those images as sacred things representing sacred persons. The Catholic Church compels no one to use images or pictures in their worship. We believe there is but one mediator between God and the people, to wit, the man Jesus Christ, but that it is a good and useful thing to invoke the saints who are glorified brethren in heaven. We allow no dissonance in matters of faith. As already said, we recognize the ecumenical councils as the fountainhead for the unity of the faith.

In them, there are ways of peace. From them, flow the stream of grace, which one day shall efface all divisions. Their kindly light shall lead all sects to union by a sincere return to Old Catholicism. Should any member of our church rebel against this, they will cease to be a member and will be regarded as a heathen and a publican. For no one has a right to add to or take away from this defined faith. Praise be the Precious Blood!

After being expelled from the Episcopal Church, he formed the Society of the Precious Blood as a religious order, and he wrote this pamphlet, *A Sketch of the Belief of the Old Catholics*, in that Society's name. With Father Jayme's help, I'd love to reprint this work, to speak about who we are as Independent Catholics here in the U.S. Vilatte consecrated several bishops throughout the U.S. One of the first bishops he consecrated was Father Stephen Kaminski, a Roman Catholic priest in Buffalo, New York, who was a predecessor of the Polish National Catholic Church. He also consecrated George McGuire, the U.S. physician and Episcopal priest who founded the African Orthodox Church, which was an Anglican expression of the Western, Latin-rite Church. At that time, the Episcopal Church in the U.S. would not ordain a Black bishop, so Vilatte came to know McGuire and consecrated him. It's a fascinating story of the plight of Black American Anglicans who were refused a bishop. The Episcopal Church is now so progressive and has been so involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, but in the early 1900s, they wouldn't even consider ordaining a Black bishop for the Blacks in the Americas! In September 1921, Vilatte consecrated George Alexander McGuire as the first bishop-primate of the Old Catholic Church. Vilatte also consecrated Carmel Henry Carfora, William Henry Francis Brothers, and others who were important in the founding of Independent Catholic expressions throughout the U.S. and the world. Later in life, Vilatte sought to reconcile with Rome. I wonder what made him feel that it was necessary to reconcile with Rome. It's possible that he sought more stability, or that he didn't have the energy that he once had. As he saw Roman Catholicism grow in the U.S., he may also have thought it to be a good move. We have no evidence that Vilatte was ever married. In 1915, he formed the American

Catholic Church, formally noting his separation from Utrecht. He wrote to the Vatican and all the patriarchates, to let them know that he was creating this church. We are all well aware of the many jurisdictions in this movement that have names resembling Vilatte's American Catholic Church; I started out in this movement in the United American Catholic Church, and I believe that Jayme belonged to the American Catholic Church in the United States for a number of years. In 1920, Vilatte retired from the American Catholic Church, and he named Bishop Frederick Ebenezer Lloyd as his successor. He disappeared from the Independent Catholic scene and reappeared in France in 1925. It seems that he was sick and broke. He approached the apostolic nuncio in Paris and repented of having illicitly received Holy Orders from the Church of Ceylon. The Roman Church sent him to do penance at the Cistercian abbey at Sainte Marie du Pont-Colbert, Versailles. He took with him a young boy, who was his servant in the U.S. Some controversy surrounds Vilatte's reconciliation with Rome. The Vatican granted him a pension of 22,000 francs per year. Despite the clear documentation that existed of his ordination by the Swiss Old Catholic Church, a Swiss newspaper in 1925 asserted that Vilatte was never a priest of the Swiss Old Catholic Church, to which the papal nuncio at that time responded in print that Vilatte was indeed ordained as an Old Catholic subdeacon, deacon and priest on June 5, 6 and 7, 1885. The papal nuncio also wrote of the evidence of Vilatte's consecration by Jacobite bishops. There would likely be few Roman Catholic prelates who would publish a letter like that today, defending our ordinations and consecrations! Vilatte spent the rest of his days at the monastery, where he was addressed as archbishop. He attended mass and received communion in the monastery, he was allowed to celebrate private mass with his servant, and he declined Pope Pius XI's suggestion that he be conditionally ordained in the Roman Church. He died of heart failure on July 8, 1929 and was buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery, where his headstone reads. "Here lies Archbishop Joseph René Vilatte."

- L. Walker: Are there any other writings after Vilatte's return to France? Did the Roman Church not insist on something from him in writing to repudiate his past?

Lopez: There are at least two letters expressing his repentance, one to the apostolic nuncio and the other to the pope, repenting for his lack of obedience to the Holy See.

L. Walker: Do you think that they were written under pressure, as a result of him being sick, tired and broke?

Lopez: I believe so. It seems he came to the end of his days with no sustenance or support system. His jig was up, and he felt he had to come home.

Vanni: Given the fact that Old Catholics have consistently rejected the primacy of the pope, based on what you've shared here, I wonder why we're so hung up on apostolic succession for Holy Orders.

Lopez: There are discussions concerning Vilatte's apostolic succession, particularly since he consecrated so many bishops. We see that when Rome received him and let him live out his life, they addressed him as archbishop. They even allowed his headstone to share that title. For the sake of time, we won't be able to fully explore his encyclical. At the 1892 General Convention of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland, the Episcopal Church wrote a concise response in regards to whether or not Vilatte was a bishop. It's fascinating to think that this group was so threatened by Vilatte that they brought the issue to their general convention! I highly doubt that any of our ministries today would be brought up at the general convention of any of the mainline churches. The report of the House of Bishops in 1892 read:

The following report, in regards to the so-called consecration of Joseph René Vilatte's episcopate, was presented to the bishops, by the bishop of Albany, New York. It appears that the bishops from whom M. Vilatte claims to have received consecration belonged to a body which is separated from Catholic Christianity because of his non-acceptance of the dogmatic decrees of the Council of Chalcedon as to the person of our blessed Lord, the same bishops, having no jurisdiction in Fond du Lac had no right to ordain a bishop for any part of the diocese, that Vilatte was never elected by any duly-accredited synod. Seeking episcopal office,

Vilatte lied about the facts of the case and seemed willing to join in with any other body—Old Catholic, Greek, Roman or Syrian—who would confer orders upon him. And more than two months before the time of the so-called consecration, Vilatte had been deposed from sacred ministry.

That's very questionable: whether Vilatte was officially deposed from ministry by the bishop of Fond du Lac.

It is resolved that the opinion of the House in the whole proceedings in connection with the episcopal consecration of Vilatte were null and void, and that this church does not recognize that any episcopal character was thereby confirmed. We understand that this is currently the opinion of many of the mainline churches in regards to Vilatte.

What does that do for us here in the U.S., particularly as we understand that so many of our orders come through apostolic succession from Vilatte?

It is resolved to state the above-recited facts to the Archbishop of Utrecht, to the Old Catholics of Germany and Switzerland, and to the metropolitan primates of the Anglican Communion. On motion, these resolutions were adopted. I attest, Samuel Hart, Bishop Secretary.

Vilatte was very intelligent, and he responded through his encyclical, which was published in the *New York Times* and throughout the country:

I deny the allegations. The bishops from whom I received consecration do receive the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon as to our blessed Lord's person. My consecrators, like myself, profess that our Lord was perfect, not a perfect [human], and thus human nature and the divine nature were preserved without confusion. "That the bishops have no jurisdiction or right to ordain a bishop for any part of the diocese in the charge of Fond du Lac." I was not consecrated bishop of the Diocese of Fond du Lac. I was consecrated archbishop for the Old Catholics of America, not for the Diocese of Fond du Lac. I should have the same right

as the Catholic Bishop, Moravian Bishop, Swedish bishop or Greek bishop in the same territories.

He's defending the fact that other churches were doing the same thing. There were other churches that were established in pre-established Episcopal dioceses.

"That Joseph Villate was never elected by any accredited synod." *Lumen de lumine* [light from light], I was duly-elected by the Old Catholic families under my care, but granted the premise, does the House of Bishops nullify the orders of Saint Ambrose because he was not elected by a duly-accredited synod, but only by the voice of an unknown child? Will that extremely-remarkable committee, appointed by the House of Bishops, inform me what synod elects the Roman bishops *in partibus*, or the Anglican bishops in Central Africa and Alaska? This charge might be effectively true, as it is not, and yet be perfectly irrelevant. "Seeking episcopal office, Vilatte lied about the facts of the case and seemed willing to join in with any other body—Old Catholic, Greek, Roman or Syrian—who would confer orders upon him." This is a reiteration of Bishop Grafton's charge against me. *Nego in toto* [I deny it altogether]. As far as making unwarrantable statements goes, I claim that the Old Catholic Church, an accomplished fact in America and established on the orthodox basis of the seven councils, the seven equally-divine sacraments and the universally-received canon for the first millennium. I stated then and still believe that this is the faith that is destined to be that of thousands of my fellow citizens in this land, and since a bishop is as necessary for the life of the Church as breath is for the life of a [person], the Old Catholics in America were logically forced to procure for themselves a bishop. This was also admitted by the Old Catholic bishops and clergy of Holland and by the Orthodox Greco-Russian Eastern rite bishops of America. The second half of the charge becomes quite harmless once the sting of madness is extracted. How can I join the Old Catholics whom I've never left? I was an Old Catholic priest ordained by the Old Catholic church. I was never a priest of the Episcopal Church.



Again, how can I expect to gain the episcopate from the Roman church, for the Old Catholic church and her are wild enemies. I may not be so learned as some of the bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, but the fourth accusation would lead people to suppose me an errant fool as well as a knave. Neither did I obtain the episcopate on false pretenses in the name of Bishop Álvares or Bishop Grafton. But I was called by the people and for the people. "More than two months before the time of episcopal consecration, Villate had been deposed from the sacred ministry." I assert without fear of contradiction that a Roman, Greek, Syrian or Old Catholic priest cannot be disposed by a Protestant bishop, except in case such a priest had abandoned his Romanism, Orthodoxy or Old Catholicism and, having become a convert to Anglicanism, had submitted himself. This I have never done. I have always been and continue to be an Old Catholic. Therefore, Bishop Grafton cannot depose me. There is absolutely no parity between my case and that of any Canadian, English or Anglican minister who submitted to the American Protestant Episcopal Church....I think, venerable brethren in the apostolate, that I have shown the premise to the conclusion of the above report to be un-Christian, absurd and contrary to fact. One may charitably hope that these resolutions and the report joined upon them, that a sapient committee sprung upon the House when it was weary and desirous of dissolving the séance. Certainly, had each bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in council been attended by a theologian, as is the case in Roman councils, no such foolish and illogical document would ever have been seen in light with my name, nor would the House of Bishops of the year 1892 be the derision and laughingstock of the Archbishop of Utrecht, the Old Catholics of Germany and Switzerland, and the metropolitan primates of the Anglican Communion. In accordance with the bishop of Springfield's resolution, the above-mentioned committee is continuing and requests to collect all available information concerning me and my consecration, to be presented at the next General

Convention. It is sincerely to be hoped that such information will be presented together with this letter and shall cause the next General Convention to withdraw itself, its untrust and untrue judgment on my case, and set itself right with all right-thinking [people]. A copy of this letter, too, will be sent to the bishop of Springfield and the bishop of the General Convention. Copies will be sent to the Archbishop of Utrecht, the primates of the European Old Catholics, the Archbishop of Uppsala, the metropolitans and primates of the Anglican Communion, the holy synods of Russia and Greece, and to all of the Eastern patriarchs and all of Holy Church....Your lowly brother, your fellow bishop, Joseph René Vilatte, Archbishop of American Old Catholics, Duvall County, Wisconsin

I just love Archbishop Vilatte's legacy, his story, his fervor and his willingness to take on the naysayers. I hope that I have been a good resource for your understanding of Archbishop Joseph René Vilatte and his ministry!

Furr: Thank you so much. I did not know that much about the man, but he is an inspiration!

## **The Only U.S. Independents to be in Union with Utrecht: The Polish National Catholic Church**

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek

My name is Marek Bożek, and if you detect a sublime accent, you're right: I was born and raised in Poland. I was almost 26 when I came to America. Hence, my accent is here to stay, and I hope you will be able to understand me in spite of my accent. I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 2002 in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, in Missouri.

In 2005, three years after my ordination, I was called to be the tenth pastor of a Polish Catholic church in St. Louis, Missouri. At that point, St. Stanislaus Church was without a priest for 17 months. They stood up to the Archdiocese and refused to sign their property over to the bishop, for which they were punished with interdict. No Catholic priest was allowed to celebrate funerals, baptisms, Sunday masses, weddings, etc. — but they survived for 17 months. They would go to church every Sunday. They would read the lectionary, sing the hymns, and then go to the church hall and drink beer and eat Polish sausage — which is obviously a good diet for the soul — since the parish stood strong. Some 17 months later, they found me and called me to be their pastor, which I eventually agreed to. I came to St. Stanislaus in St. Louis, Missouri on December 24, 2005. The church and I were immediately excommunicated, so Christmas 2005 marks the beginning of my Independent Catholic experience.

Since then, we have not only survived; we have evolved and thrived. We have become a multi-generational, multiracial, multilingual, Catholic community. We kept widening our horizons, and we kept opening doors, both literal and metaphorical. We began by opening communion to all baptized Christians; that was our first “unorthodox” step. Then we invited former Roman Catholic priests, who had left the priesthood and married, to preside at liturgy. Then we invited women to discern their vocation to ordained ministry. Our next step was inclusion of LGBT people in all levels of the parish life, including the sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders. It has been an exciting journey for us these past 17 years! We are still standing strong, slowly recovering from the pandemic, but, with God's grace, I know that the future of that beautiful parish is bright.

The Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) is a very unique, beautiful, interesting, challenging and annoying entity. It has existed longer than most U.S. non-Roman Catholic churches. It has gone through

several stages of expansion and contraction. But it's a wonderful story that I hope many of you will find inspiring, if at times annoying as well!

St. Stanislaus in St. Louis is not affiliated with the PNCC. There was a time when St. Stanislaus was discerning affiliation with some major ecclesial bodies, and, naturally, the Polish National Catholic Church was one of the communities we reached out to, to discern the hypothetical possibility of journeying together. Following our excommunication, we talked to the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, the Polish National Catholic Church, and the Episcopal Church's Diocese of Missouri. Out of these three entities, union or affiliation with the Episcopal Church was the closest to coming to fruition, but the Polish National Catholic Church was probably the most natural direction. As some of you know, the PNCC today is a bit more traditional and exclusive than St. Stanislaus is, so, while there is a connection of national heritage and language, there are some things that make us very unlike the Polish National Catholic Church.

My presentation can be divided into three main parts. (1) We'll talk first about the pre-history of the Polish National Catholic Church, about those reform movements in Poland and here in the U.S. that preceded the PNCC. (2) We will focus on the PNCC's history proper, which started 125 years ago, in 1897, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. We'll talk about Bishop Francis Hodur, the first bishop in 1907, and the leader for many decades of this denomination. And then we'll talk about the growth and expansion of the church here and in the homeland. (3) We will look closer into the doctrine and the structure of this church. We will talk about its membership in the Union of Utrecht (1907-2003), and how that relationship came to an end in 2003. We will also discuss its unique relationship with the Episcopal Church. The PNCC was the only Independent Catholic church in the U.S. to ever have a full communion agreement with the Episcopal Church (1946-1978). We will also talk about their ongoing dialogue and relationship with the Mother Church, the Roman Catholic Church.

We start with the PNCC's pre-history, which goes back much further than 1897. The Polish National Catholic Church, like all modern reform movements, has its roots in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which nearly caused Poland to become a Protestant country. Outwardly, the Counter Reformation brought that possibility to an end by 1600, but the spirit of religious independence continued to stir and never fully died. That statement may sound shocking, since Poland is a bastion of Roman Catholicism in Europe and in the Western world. It is today, but it has not always been so.

There was a time when one of our kings, King Sigismund II, was very impressed and inspired by Henry VIII and also by the Hussite movement, which was centered in the present-day Czech Republic, just south of the Polish border. In 1531, King Sigismund II considered creating a Catholic state church in Poland outside of Roman jurisdiction. The Polish Parliament discussed this possibility in 1531, but no vote was taken at that time—fortunately or unfortunately, depending on where you stand on the issue. As in many of our stories, the Jesuits entered the picture and played a decisive role in keeping Poland under Roman Catholic influence.

One of the most famous Polish reformers—famous in both Poland and England—was Jan Łaski (or John à Lasco, as he was known in England). He lived in England for several decades, and was a big admirer of the theology and methods of Cranmer. In 1550, King Edward VI granted him permission to establish a congregation for European Protestants in London. Upon Łaski's return to his homeland, he tried to bring together various Reformation movements in Poland. 1559 marked the high tide of the Reformation in Poland: At that time, there were 640 Protestant congregations in the Kingdom of Poland and more than 2,000 Polish noble families had broken with Rome and become members of those Protestant congregations. Beginning in 1564, the first Jesuits came to Poland and began to decimate the Reformation movement in the Kingdom of Poland. One of the Jesuits even became the king's confessor, slowly influencing him and helping to consolidate Poles under the rule of Roman Catholic bishops. After the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most Protestants went into hiding or emigrated.

The Polish National Catholic Church was not the first Old Catholic ecclesial body in the U.S. The very first group of Poles in America to break with Rome was led by Father Antoni Stanislaus Kozlowski. In January 1895, Father Kozlowski organized the independent parish of All Saints in Chicago. Four months later, his parishioners erected a new parish church. You heard that correctly: Within four months of leaving their Roman Catholic parish, they had built a new church!

They united with other independent congregations in the same neighborhood, and they elected Father Kozlowski as their bishop. His election was soon afterwards approved by the Old Catholic Council in Bern, Switzerland, and he traveled to Switzerland and was consecrated there on November 13, 1897 by Bishop Herzog of Bern, Switzerland. Archbishop Gul of Utrecht and Bishop Weber of Bonn, of the German Old Catholic Church, served as co-consecrators. So, the first bishop in the U.S. to be consecrated by the Union of Utrecht was not a member

of the PNCC, and Father Kozlowski was consecrated ten years before Bishop Hodur was consecrated by the Union of Utrecht for the PNCC.

Kozlowski's new diocese was recognized by Utrecht as an Old Catholic diocese. During the next ten years, he organized 23 parishes from New Jersey to Manitoba, Canada. His organization was known as the Polish Old Catholic Church, and he frequently attended the Old Catholic synods in Europe. After ten years as a bishop, Kozlowski died on January 14, 1907, without having consecrated a single bishop—a praiseworthy example for U.S. bishops, who seem to be very eager to consecrate bishops all over the place!

After Kozlowski's death, his clergy in the Chicago area proposed to unite with the congregations of the Polish National Catholic Church, which was organizing along the East Coast and in the Midwest. The Polish Old Catholic Church is worthy of being remembered as the very first member church of the Union of Utrecht in these United States.

Another group that precedes and predates the Polish National Catholic Church was based in Buffalo, New York. Joseph René Vilatte had consecrated a number of Polish priests to the episcopacy in Buffalo. The people of the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Adalbert in Buffalo were engaged in a struggle with the hierarchy for control of property and buildings, which they themselves had paid for and built. Several riots ensued in Buffalo, in which the Church authorities had to call on the police. Finally, the parishioners started afresh and erected a new community: Our Lady of the Rosary. The first open-air mass was held there on August 8, 1895, and the congregation grew so rapidly that they erected some of the most imposing buildings in Buffalo. If you visit Buffalo, visit the truly impressive Polish National Catholic churches there!

In 1896, Father Stanislaus Kaminski was called to be a parish priest, and he was chosen by the parishioners at their synod to be a bishop. In 1898, Father Kaminski was consecrated to the episcopacy by Joseph René Vilatte as a suffragan bishop for the Polish Old Catholics. In 1910, Joseph Vilatte founded and organized the American Catholic Church in Buffalo, and his oversight council included Bishop Kaminski and Paolo Miraglia. All three are pictured together in a famous photo.

Kaminski's association with Vilatte, though, was not well accepted by his Polish parishioners, and this led to division within their group. As a result, the parishes in Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago left his episcopal oversight and applied to be received into the PNCC, which was being organized by Father Hodur. This left Bishop Kaminski with a single

parish in Buffalo, New York, which, after his death, also joined the PNCC.

At this point, we see two ecclesial bodies that predate the creation of the Polish National Catholic Church: the Polish Old Catholic Church in Chicago was received by the Union of Utrecht, and the American Catholic Church of Bishops Kozlowski and Vilatte was not received by the Union of Utrecht.

Now we come to the story of the very beginnings of the Polish National Catholic Church. Like our current President, Joe Biden, it has its roots in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At that time, Scranton had a sizable Polish population, consisting mainly of coal miners and factory workers, with their families. During the 1890s, these hardworking Polish immigrants contributed out of their small savings toward the building of Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church.

In 1896, a delegation of Polish parishioners waited for their pastor, Father Aust, with the request that some of them be represented in the management of parish affairs. The request was declined in a very rude and offensive manner, and the pride of these Polish coal miners was deeply wounded. To make matters worse, Father Aust contacted their local bishop, Bishop O'Hara, and the bishop sent a letter to the Polish members of Sacred Heart Parish reproving them for disobedience and demanding that they happily submit to the hierarchy of the Church. Unhappily, matters grew steadily worse, culminating in a free-for-all fist fight in front of the church when parishioners attempted to stop the parish priest from entering! More than a dozen parishioners were arrested and, by the order of their Irish mayor, were given very stern sentences. These dissatisfied parishioners left the parish and purchased a tract of land diagonally across the street from Sacred Heart, and they built their own church, St. Stanislaus, which would belong to them alone, and not to the Roman Catholic bishop of the diocese.

As these events took place in Scranton, the Poles turned for counsel to Father Francis Hodur, the pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in the neighboring town of Nanticoke, who previously served as associate pastor at Sacred Heart in Scranton. That conversation proved to be of decisive importance for the future life of their church! After hearing their story, Father Hodur said, "Let all those who are dissatisfied and feel wronged set about organizing and building a new church.

After St. Stanislaus was complete, parishioners approached Bishop O'Hara, asking him to consecrate their new church and to appoint for them a pastor. They even offered him a fat envelope filled with \$100, the customary fee for a church consecration by a bishop. Bishop O'Hara

refused unless they signed over the title of the property to his name. He pointed out that the 1852 Plenary Council of Baltimore prohibited church property from being in the name of lay trustees.

Refused by their bishop, the delegates turned again to Father Hodur, asking him to come to Scranton and serve as their first pastor and spiritual leader. On March 14, 1897, Father Hodur accepted their call and became the pastor of the independent St. Stanislaus Parish in Scranton. This is considered the founding moment of this new denomination, the PNCC.

Father Hodur is a fascinating person, and his story is worthy of study. He was born on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1866, in the village of Zarki, 35 miles from Kraków, in present-day southern Poland, which, at that time, was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He enrolled as a seminarian in Kraków, and he studied at the Jagiellonian University, one of the oldest universities in Europe, which dates to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In December 1892, he came to the U.S., where he hoped to serve Polish immigrants. There is some mystery as to why he left the Polish seminary. His critics accused him of shady behavior during his seminary training, while his official biography speaks of his vocation to serve the Polish immigrants in America. Hodur was received into the Diocese of Scranton and was sent to complete his seminary studies at St. Vincent's Benedictine Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. On August 19, 1893, eight months after arriving in the U.S., Hodur was ordained a Roman Catholic priest by Bishop William O'Hara, the bishop he would come to oppose four years later.

After joining the rebellious St. Stanislaus Parish, Father Hodur wanted to do things right: He decided, with the aid of two or three lay members, to appeal their case to the Vatican. Though he never received an audience with the pope, he met with Polish cardinal Mieczysław Halka-Ledóchowski, who was working in the Vatican. None of their pleas were well received, and they were sent home packing. Soon after they returned to the U.S., Hodur received the official sentence of excommunication on October 22, 1898.

On December 16, 1900, the parish assembly of St. Stanislaus in Scranton decided to definitively break with the Roman Catholic Church in matters of doctrine, worship and organization. The first expression of that independence from Rome in 1900 was the adoption of the vernacular – the Polish language – for all church services. They offered their first Polish mass on Christmas 1900.

In 1904, the various congregations of this new movement were brought together for their first synod in Scranton. 147 lay and ordained



delegates representing about 20,000 people united under the name of the Polish National Catholic Church in America. The newly-organized church adopted an expanded constitution, which contained the basic principles of St. Stanislaus. Resolutions were adopted expressing a desire for fraternal cooperation with other Christian churches. At that time, Pio Nono forbade the ecumenical movement, and Roman Catholics who attempted ecumenical relations were threatened with excommunication. The fact that the very first synod of the PNCC publicly spoke of its desire for stronger ecumenical ties with other Christian churches was significant. At that 1904 synod, Father Francis Hodur was elected bishop and administrator of the church.

At that time, the archbishop of Utrecht and other Old Catholic bishops in Europe did not agree to consecrate Father Francis Hodur because they already had a Polish bishop, Kozlowski, in Chicago. The PNCC was seen as a schism, and Utrecht was not willing to consecrate their bishop-elect.

Fortunately for Hodur, and unfortunately for the Polish Old Catholic Church in Chicago, Bishop Kozlowski died three years later, on January 14, 1907. Kozlowski's parishes of the Polish Old Catholic Church, centered in Chicago, voted to join the now-larger ecclesial structure of the Polish National Catholic Church. Once that unity happened, and there was no other Old Catholic bishop on the continent, Utrecht agreed to consecrate Father Hodur to the episcopacy. On September 29, 1907, Hodur was consecrated in the hidden church of St. Gertrude in Utrecht by Old Catholic Archbishop Gerardus Gul of Utrecht, Bishop Johannes Jacobus van Theil of Haarlem, and Bishop Nicolas Bartholomaeus Petrus Spit of Deventer. The beautiful present-day cathedral of St. Gertrude had not yet been built.

This newly-formed church grew quite quickly, from 20,000 members in 1904, to 62,000 members in 1926. It gained many adherents among Polish Catholics who felt at home in its parishes. By the 1950s and 1960s, membership had exceeded 280,000 members.

Shortly after, the bond of unity between the laity was strengthened by the founding of the Polish National Union in America, a mutual benefit society and fraternal organization. Although it was set up along parish lines and functioned as an adjunct to parish life, it did not require membership in the PNCC to share in insurance benefits.

A similar problem led the opening of PNCC cemeteries. Most PNCC members were refused burial in Roman Catholic cemeteries, so they had no choice but to buy their own land and establish their own PNCC cemeteries.

For several years, Bishop Hodur was privately training young men for the church's priesthood. Out of this informal training eventually developed the Savonarola Seminary with Bishop Hodur as its rector and dean. In 1927, Hodur bought a small residence near the St. Stanislaus Cathedral in Scranton for the new school. It is located on a rather noisy street corner, but the three-story house continues to provide classrooms and living quarters for up to 16 seminarians at a time today.

In 1921, the Polish National Catholic Church began a mission to the nation of Poland and set up 55 parishes for about 55,000 Polish members. Joseph Padewski was consecrated bishop in 1936 for the church's missionary work in Poland. Naturally, the growth of the PNCC was halted with the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939. During World War II, the missionary diocese in Poland saw the destruction of its churches and the imprisonment, torture and murder of many of its clergy. Fully three-fourths of the diocese was destroyed. Bishop Padewski was imprisoned and tortured by the Nazis, then later released as an American prisoner of war—thanks to his U.S. citizenship—in exchange for a German general who was imprisoned by the U.S. Army. Following World War II, Bishop Padewski returned to Poland and worked to rebuild his missionary diocese. Initially, he succeeded, and the Communist regime in Poland tolerated this new Catholic church. Soon afterwards, though, he was arrested by Communist authorities, imprisoned, tortured by the Secret Service of Poland, and he was murdered on May 10, 1951, at the age of 57 years old. He is buried in Warsaw, Poland. I believe he is the only Old Catholic bishop who was martyred for his faith. He is considered a martyr and saint in the Polish National Catholic Church.

In 1951, the Communist regime suppressed all contact between the Polish and American dioceses. Since then, a separate national church, the Polish Catholic Church, was established and still exists in Poland to this day.

The faith of the Polish National Catholic Church is defined, in their own words, by scripture, sacred tradition and the commonly-held ecumenical councils of the undivided Church. They profess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. They have their own confession of faith. They subscribe to the Eleven Great Principles and the Declaration of Scranton.

The Polish National Catholic Church clearly rejects the teachings of Vatican I, including the dogmas of papal infallibility and universal papal jurisdiction. They reject the 1854 doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and they decline to accept the 1950 dogma of the Assumption. Interestingly enough, the PNCC does not subscribe to the theological concept of original sin. In eschatology, they believe that, "all [people] will

eventually attain to the goal of heavenly union with God. Only the degree of union is dependent on the fidelity to the will of God before death." The PNCC clearly embraces a universalist eschatology, where all people will attain salvation. Importantly, they "reject the contemporary innovations promulgated by the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. We also regard these innovations as being in defiance of the Holy Scriptures and in contradiction to the Tradition of the first centuries, namely: the ordination of women to the holy priesthood, the consecration of women to the episcopate, and the blessings of same-sex union" (Declaration of Scranton, April 28, 2008).

Many, if not all, of us frown upon that new development, but if you want to be charitable and generous, you notice that they do not reject the possibility of ordination of women to the diaconate. They are very much open to that possibility.

The structure of the church is very familiar to all of us. Church matters are dealt with on three levels: the whole church level, the diocesan level, and the local parish level.

At the level of the whole church, the PNCC is governed by a General Synod, which can be convened every four years to discuss church matters, interpret religious teachings, select bishop candidates, and establish church policy, law and discipline. The Supreme Council meets annually to review the church's work and administer all business that concerns the whole church. The third institution on the national level is the prime bishop, who is the chief executive of the church on the national level.

On the diocesan level, the diocesan synod is held within two years after each General Synod to implement all the decisions of the General Synod. The Diocesan Council administers the business of the diocese. Diocesan Bishops are elected at the General Synod, and they appoint priests, preside over the diocesan council, and they confer sacraments. Senior priests are not senior by the virtue of age, but might be likened to the deans of the Roman Catholic Church. A senior priest is appointed to oversee five or six parishes.

On the parish level, the Pastor or Rector is appointed by the Bishop, in contrast to many non-Roman Catholic churches. The parish hosts an annual meeting to elect committee members, review parish reports and budgets, etc. The Parish Committee is elected by the parish, with at least nine members who serve and assist the Pastor, fulfilling parish and synodal resolutions, keeping records, etc.

The structure of the PNCC is both episcopal and synodal. It is democratic to an extent, since its bishops are elected and its teachings

and policies are voted upon by the General Synod and the Diocesan Synod, and both clergy and lay people have the same right to vote on doctrine, on the election of bishops, and so on.

Let's talk about the unity and disunity that have been experienced by the Polish National Catholic Church. After the death of Bishop Kozłowski in Chicago, and after the consecration of Bishop Hodur in 1907, the Polish National Catholic Church became a member church of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches. The PNCC representatives participated regularly in the meetings of the International Old Catholic Bishops Conference (IBC). In 1976, the IBC issued a declaration opposing the ordination of women, which was unanimously approved by all Old Catholic bishops. Shortly after that, parishes in Germany began a campaign to pressure the German Old Catholic Church, which ordained its first women priests 21 years later, in 1997. The Polish National Catholic Church reacted very strongly to this, accusing the Old Catholic Church in Germany of breaking the unanimous decision of the Old Catholic Bishops Conference. Strictly speaking, they were correct. After the ordination of women in 1997, the Old Catholic bishops recognized that some member churches could allow ordination of women, and that others might not. The IBC acknowledged that this could cause a break in communion, and they decided in 1997 to resolve the situation no later than 2003.

The Old Catholic ecumenical strategy represented another bone of contention for the PNCC. In the late 1990s or early 2000s, the German Old Catholics unilaterally entered into an intercommunion agreement with the Lutherans of Germany. The PNCC, whose dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church had resulted by that time in an arrangement of limited *communio in sacris* (intercommunion) did not support sacramental sharing with Lutherans or other ecclesial communities that do not possess apostolic succession. By 2003, because of the ordination of women by the German Catholic Church and the intercommunion agreements between German Old Catholics and Lutherans, the Polish National Catholic Church bishops were becoming more and more uncomfortable in the Union Utrecht. At the November 2003 annual meeting of the IBC in Prague, Czech Republic, the issues of the ordination of women and the blessing of same-sex couples officially divided the Union of Utrecht, and the PNCC refused to restore full communion with the churches of the Union of Utrecht that ordained women. Because they further refused to re-establish full communion with the German Old Catholic Church, they were voted out of the Union of Utrecht in 2003. In this way, their membership in the Union of Utrecht

of Old Catholic Churches lasted under 100 years, from 1907 until November 2003.

The Polish National Catholic Church also had a very fruitful relationship with the Episcopal Church in the U.S. The PNCC participated in a local intercommunion agreement with the Episcopal Church from 1946 to 1978. The Anglican Church of Canada was also a party to that interconnection agreement with the PNCC. The local manifestation of Anglican-Old Catholic full communion, which began with the 1931 Bonn Agreement, involved the practical sharing of Eucharistic fellowship between the PNCC and Episcopal parishes, an exchange in theological education, common responsibility for military and university chaplaincies (which was extremely important since the PNCC did not have enough military chaplains), and ongoing theological/ecumenical discussions. The PNCC/TEC dialogue commission met on an annual basis. This was the primary and most important ecumenical relationship for both of these churches during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, the sacramental intercommunion was ended between the PNCC and the Episcopal Church in 1978 over the issue of women's ordination, which was approved two years prior at the 1976 General Convention of the Episcopal Church. In 1978, PNCC bishops, priests and lay people participated in a democratic process at their Synod and unilaterally voted to terminate intercommunion with the Episcopal Church. Interestingly, the Episcopal Church canon law still recognizes the Polish National Catholic Church's ordinations and sacraments as valid, and, should a PNCC deacon, priest or bishop desire to become Episcopal, they will not be re-ordained or re-consecrated; they will be received, just as ex-Roman Catholic priests are when they join the Episcopal Church.

Let's talk about the PNCC's dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, which officially began in 1984, when the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Polish National Catholic Church established a dialogue commission that meets twice each year. (I don't believe that they have met since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.) In 1993, Cardinal Cassidy, who was the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, issued a statement which allowed PNCC members in the U.S. and Canada to receive the sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion and Anointing of the Sick in Roman Catholic parishes and from Roman Catholic priests, if the PNCC members asked for them and were properly disposed to receive the sacraments. In 1998, the PNCC, in return, issued similar guidelines that allow Roman Catholic faithful to receive sacraments in the Polish National Catholic Church. If

it sounds like intercommunion, it probably is. It's not full communion, but we might call it *communio in sacris*. Inside the back cover of Roman Catholic missals, you may have seen an announcement that states that members of the Polish National Catholic Church can receive Communion in Roman Catholic parishes, as of 1993. On May 17, 2006, the Joint Commission of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the PNCC issued a joint statement that reads,

We, the members of the PNCC-RC dialogue, wish to reaffirm our resolve to overcome what still divides us and to state clearly that our goal is full communion between our churches. We wish to emphasize that "full communion" does not mean absorption or uniformity, but a unity that fully recognizes different traditions that are consistent with our common apostolic faith.

An anecdote suggests that when the Anglican ordinariates were created by Pope Benedict XVI, the Polish National Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church Dialogue Commission were quite advanced in a draft of an institution that would be similar to Anglican ordinariates. Under this draft, the Polish National Catholic Church would become an ordinariate within the Roman Catholic Church. It would be allowed to continue its own liturgies and to have its own governance, and to exist as a semi-diocese or ordinariate in Roman Catholic canon law. Why did this not come to fruition? Because, as was the case with Anglican bishops, the PNCC bishops who were married had to resign their episcopacy and function as monsignors; only celibate bishops could be appointed to the PNCC ordinariates! This is merely anecdotal: My friends tell me this, but no one will confirm it in writing. The PNCC bishops refused to be "demoted" and to accept celibate bishops appointed to head the hypothetical future PNCC ordinariates.

I submit to you that the Polish National Catholic Church is a very healthy Old Catholic Church in this country, despite its conservative or exclusionary policies. Its system of structure and governance is healthy. Even though they hold on to sexist and homophobic policies, theoretically, there is nothing that prevents the next General Synod from changing such positions. As is true in our political world, enough votes, enough pressure and enough lobbying might eventually bring change to the Polish National Catholic Church. There is no doubt in my mind that sooner or later the PNCC will ordain people of all genders to the diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate, and I pray that sooner or later they will also come to bless all loving unions, including same-sex

marriages. Who knows when this will happen, but they have a healthy process in place, which allows for the conversation to happen, and which allows for reform and change to take place. Let's not disregard or ignore the PNCC simply because of its current positions. Instead, let's hope and pray that one day this beautiful and vibrant Old Catholic Church in the U.S. will come to its senses and will see the beauty of the inclusive message of Christ!

**Reflections on  
the Only U.S. Independents to be in Union with Utrecht:  
The Polish National Catholic Church**

- Mathias: I was not aware of the precursors of the PNCC and its formation prior to 1897. What a rich pre-history they possess as a church!
- Robison: In my experience, many PNCC clergy are Freemasons, and I accidentally exchanged “pass grips” with them in public. In fact, some of their bishops wear ornate rings with a compass and square, rather than traditional episcopal rings. I wonder if that causes an issue in their relationship with Rome, since Rome still seems to think that Freemasons are hiding under the bed, waiting to take over the world!
- Bożek: I don’t know the answer to that. I’m guessing that Masonic affiliation is a recent phenomenon in the PNCC. I understand that many Masonic lodges, like many other social clubs, did not look favorably on Polish immigrants for a long time. As a result, Poles were not welcomed into many lodges. For a Polish immigrant to join such a lodge could be seen as an advance in social status—particularly since the PNCC was mostly a church of factory workers, coal miners and simple folks. The PNCC was a proletariat church—not a church of professors, like the Union of Utrecht. I can certainly see how belonging to an exclusive organization, in their view, could be attractive.
- Robison: Most of my Masonic relatives are working-class, and I was certainly surprised when I first saw an esoteric, Masonic ring on the finger of a bishop! I also found it odd to receive Masonic pass grips during the sign of peace at church!
- D’Arrigo: Coming from an Anglican background, I’m familiar with the foibles and problems that Rome created in the Anglican ordinariate. Honestly, it’s astoundingly frightening. I hear your prayerful desire for the PNCC to have a metanoia reaction and decide that they’re going to rethink women’s ordination, but I wonder if, 15 years later, they’re still keen on the possibility of full communion with Rome.
- Bożek: We might answer that at two levels: They would love full communion with Rome, but what has been proposed to



them is a “slap in the face.” The “original sin” of Polish pride, that strength that we saw at St. Stanislaus in Buffalo and at St. Stanislaus in St. Louis, continues to resurface. To my knowledge, the PNCC-RC Joint Committee has not met since 2019. I wonder if it’s because the married PNCC bishops were offended by the thought of “leaving their miters at the door.” Because they did not take kindly to that suggestion, I don’t see a path forward. In their outward messaging, they still speak of their desire for full communion, as they said in 2006. We have not seen anything during the past three years, and I doubt we’ll see anything even after the pandemic dies down. It will probably take another generation for us to see whether they become more Roman Catholic or more inclusive. When I say that I am hopeful for the PNCC’s future, I recognize that their teenagers, who are growing up with same-sex parents, neighbors, uncles and aunts, will soon be voting members of their parish council, diocesan synods, and at the national level. In 20, 30 or 40 years, those teenagers today will one day vote to make the PNCC a better and healthier church. The fact that they possess a healthy, democratic structure makes a huge difference; there is no such structure in the Roman Church. Once today’s teenagers become bishops, priests and lay leaders, the situation will change!

D’Arrigo: I’m so prayerful for the next generation—in the PNCC and across all denominations! The healthiness of the PNCC is that they are so fully democratic, and willing to dialogue and discuss things.

Mathias: Help us, Father Marek, to understand the Polish Catholic culture. When many of us hear the words “Polish Catholic,” we may not necessarily think of the most progressive forces within the Catholic Church. Frankly, I think of some very conservative forces, like John Paul II, whose conservatism will be felt by the Roman Church for generations. Yet we see your own Polish community of St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, which, after your leadership of the past 17 years, seems to manifest a more inclusive community, one that is open to women clergy and the LGBTQIA+ community. Has St. Stanislaus always been like that? Did you bring them kicking and screaming to where they are today? Can you give us some insight into your community

and into the larger Polish Catholic community in the United States and/or throughout the world?

Bożek: That's a fascinating question, and yes, "kicking and screaming" is part of Polish culture! On a serious note, the connection between Rome and Poland became unbreakable between 1795 and 1918. The Kingdom of Poland ceased to exist in 1795. It was conquered and divided by three European empires: czarist Russia, the German empires, and the Austro-Hungarian empire in the south. From 1795 to 1918, there was no Poland, and the Polish people were divided between three different countries and forced to fight in foreign armies. The only unifying force that kept "Polishness" together was Catholicism, the Roman Church! Poland was not unlike Ireland, which also created an extremely powerful Irish-Catholic identity. I am 47 years old, and I grew up as a child and teenager under the Communist regime. The government controlled every single part of our lives: The government controlled what movies were shown in theaters, what books were printed, what articles were shared in the newspapers, what plays were performed in theaters, and what teachers could say. Censorship was everywhere. The only place that created a space of freedom was the Catholic Church. So, picture a teenager who is attracted by everything that's forbidden, and all those forbidden things are present in the Roman Catholic Church! We went to church to read forbidden books, to watch forbidden movies, to stage forbidden plays in the sanctuary, in front of the altar! As a young teenager, for me, the Roman Church was "Noah's Ark." We went to church to maintain our freedom and to keep our integrity intact. It was the only place we could be free. I didn't have the vocabulary back then, but the Church practiced a sort of "liberation theology." For people of my generation, the experience of Catholicism was the experience of liberation. It was the experience of a revolt against an oppressive regime and government that controlled every single part of our lives. I wanted to be like those priests who were arrested and murdered by the regime. They were superheroes—not in capes, but in cassocks. I wanted to be someone who could create that space of freedom, truth and integrity that did not exist outside the Church. I am one of many in my generation

who were attracted by that “liberation theology” of the Polish Church in the 1980s. That’s where many of those Polish liberation reform movements came from: We grew up in a Church that was speaking the language of freedom and standing up for justice against oppression. John Paul II was who he was, and his legacy will forever be stained in many ways, but his refusal to look at women the way we do was based on his upbringing in a small Polish family in the 1920s and 1930s. I’m not excusing him; I am explaining where he came from, and if this change could take place at St. Stanislaus in St. Louis, a very small and lower-middle class, working parish that was not progressive or democratic in any way, shape or form, that is an indication that—forgive me if you have sensitive ears—old-world Poles can come to understand that testicles cannot be required for ordination. During the course of 17 years, I have witnessed the miracle of hardworking, productive immigrants coming to see that two women or two men who love each other are as worthy and as deserving of God’s blessing as any heterosexual couple. 17 years ago, our parish—like St. Stanislaus in Scranton, Pennsylvania—was not an inclusive parish. The issue was property and ownership, but their firsthand experience of being excluded, and the pain of marginalization, brought to an end their old beliefs. They realized it does not feel good to be an outcast. From that experience of pain and trauma came our very conscious process of saying: We know the pain firsthand, and we don’t want that pain to be experienced by others! I don’t mean to sound messianic, but that experience of Good Friday brought us to a resurrection and transformation of our theology. We decided that we wanted to be a space where people can be healed and uplifted, not excluded.

Mathias: When we speak of exclusion and pain, we are well aware here in the United States of the possible exclusion and pain that other cultures may have caused for Polish people. I grew up, for instance, in a culture that told jokes about Polish people, labeling them as Pollocks. I’m sure most of us here have heard a joke or two in our day: “How many Pollocks does it take to change a lightbulb?” We know that such words arise from the prejudices and stereotypes of people. Some of them are deeply rooted in the xenophobic fabric of

American culture. Is there anything you might say about that? And also, in the chatbox, Deacon Melina is wondering about any connection between the Roman Church and the Polish Solidarity movement.

Bożek: In the Polish language, “pollock” means a Polish person. In English, I say that I’m a “Pole,” but in Polish I say, “*Jestem Pollock*. I am Pollock.” It’s perhaps the opposite direction of the word “queer,” which began as an insult, but then was owned, embraced and redeemed by people. The word “Pollock” experienced the opposite: It began as something positive, a simple adjective to state who I am, then it was used in a pejorative way. I am not offended by the word: When I hear it, I assume the person speaks some Polish and is calling me a Polish person. The jokes, I’ve been told, were not unusual. Similar jokes were told of other immigrant communities: of Irish people, Italian people, Mexican people. Unfortunately, xenophobia is doing well in our country. The Solidarity movement is factually tied very closely to that Polish and Roman Catholic experience. The connection is the Church of my youth, the Church of *męczenników*, of the martyrs, the Church that spoke for justice when nobody else would. That solidarity in the Roman Church of the 1980s is why I became a priest. That was one of the most transformative movements in European history. As a 13 year-old boy, I was sent by our Solidarity movement leaders after midnight with buckets of glue, to glue the posters of Solidarity and of Lech Wałęsa on the walls of our cities. I couldn’t do much else, but, as a teenager, I could do that much, and we all sensed that we were part of something bigger than ourselves. I was caught by the police with a bucket of glue, and I was brought home to my parents and grounded for a while afterwards – but we all knew that what was happening in front of us was transforming our city and our country!

Mathias: Reverend Canon Michelangelo shares in the chatbox that the Solidarity movement inspired him to become a political activist.

Brohl: I am touched by the warmth with which you speak of your Polish heritage, the Polish National Catholic Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. Because of my own search, that has

touched me deeply, and I am appreciate of all that you have said tonight. I remember communicating with you at a time when St. Stanislaus was having difficulty with the idea of joining some other, larger group, and I recall asking you, "Why don't you become a bishop?" I remember your response: "Absolutely not!" You brought that memory to mind last year when you shared your presentation in Las Vegas on the *sine qua non* conditions under which you might consider returning to the Roman Church or under which we might come together. Part of that had to do with bishops setting aside their miters, unless communities required them. I am prepared to set aside my episcopacy for the sake of the movement! In fact, I'd be happy not to be called "Bishop," but to be called "Father."

Mathias: We certainly don't mean to offend anyone by our use of titles, but we do have some very dedicated lay leaders with us who want to know who we are and the ways in which we serve the Church. Thank you, Father Marek, for being such a rich resource for us and for refreshing our memory of the very rich history of the Polish National Catholic Church!

**From Renegade Roman Catholic Bishop  
to Independent Catholic Saint:  
Carlos Duarte Costa**

Dr. Edward Jarvis

Today I hope to share with you some insights, thoughts and comments that you might not find in other places. I propose to discuss three aspects of the life of Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa. I will mention some aspects of his formation and background: the things that made him the man, the priest, and the bishop he was. I then propose to talk about his personality, leadership style, and the clues we have to his personal life and character. We'll put on our "detective hats" and see what information and "leads" we have. I then propose to talk about his legacy.

Those of you who have a link to Duarte Costa, as deacons, priests and bishops in apostolic succession, might ask yourselves what it means to carry on the remarkable legacy of this man. More generally, all Christians might look to this man who died only six decades ago and ask what his legacy means for us.

The title of this talk is "Carlos Duarte Costa: From Renegade Roman Catholic Bishop to Independent Catholic Saint." Those are big claims, of course, but in the case of Carlos Duarte Acosta, they are both descriptors which are thoroughly earned.

Throughout history, there have always been renegade Roman Catholic bishops. We could probably name quite a few. We find renegade bishops in the early Church of the first three centuries. We see renegade bishops during the Protestant Reformation and the Counter Reformation. Closer to our lifetimes, there have been many bishops who have quit, gotten married, and even renounced the faith. We've also had bishops who simply disappeared: In the United Kingdom, we had the case of a bishop who just got in his car and took off, like "Thelma and Louise," but with no Louise! These cases do happen.

Among renegade bishops, Carlos Duarte Costa is unique. In the vast majority of cases, bishops quit, take off, and drop their ministry. They experience a moment of quitting, and the end of their tenure as a Roman Catholic bishop generally coincides with quitting the ministry and any kind of sacramental activity. Generally, they don't continue with any kind of church activity. Carlos Duarte Acosta did, and that's one of the things that makes him unique.

An Independent Catholic saint? There will always be debate over what makes “sainthood” and what makes a “saint.” Some jurisdictions have very clear procedures and rules for declaring someone a saint, and I will not tread on any of those toes. The veneration of saints is, by nature, a popular thing; It happens at a popular level. It’s spontaneous and heartfelt. Even the Roman Catholic Church, with its quite strict procedures for declaring someone a saint, insists on an initial level of popular devotion and veneration. We can certainly say that Carlos Duarte Costa enjoys popular, widespread, heartfelt, enduring veneration, especially in Latin America: in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela and other nations. Popular veneration of him exists, perhaps even in the United States. As a result, we have this figure who was a renegade Roman Catholic bishop and is now an Independent Catholic saint!

Carlos Duarte Costa was born in Brazil in 1888. This was really a historic turning point in Brazil, which was still a young country. It was first settled by the Portuguese as a colony in 1500, but change really began to happen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the king of Portugal granted a certain level of independence to Brazil. The king of Portugal and those who were involved in the colonization of Brazil were not particularly religious, not particularly in love with the Catholic Church and the reality of Catholicism. They allowed the reality of Catholicism to develop in a unique and decentralized way. In 1500, the pope granted enormous powers to the king of Portugal, effectively saying, “The church in your colonies is your business: You appoint the bishops and do what needs to be done!” Considering the distances at that time—1500s, 1600s and 1700s—and the impossibility of regular communication, the Brazilian Church developed its own character and practices. The Church of Brazil was also characterized by some abuses, including the taking of bribes and different approaches to personal conduct and personal morality. It wasn’t all mayhem and chaos, but it certainly must have been a colorful and strange reality to be part of the Catholic Church in Brazil!

In 1889, when Carlos Duarte Acosta was less than one year old, Brazil became a republic under the leadership of men who were not particularly Catholic, but were instead quite a multifaith group. There were Freemasons, free thinkers and spiritists. There were dissenting voices. There was also the Catholic Church, which was quite independent and not under the heel of Rome. As a constitutional republic, the Brazil government was very openminded and liberal in the old sense of the word. And it was not particularly crazy about the Vatican. Carlos Duarte Costa was born into this context.

It may not surprise some people to discover that Carlos Duarte Costa came from a political family. We don't know much about his father's side of the family, but his maternal grandfather was part of five or six generations of lawmakers in provincial, state and national legislatures. The family also possessed admirals and senior lawyers and was generally of a liberal political persuasion, particularly with respect to free trade and taxation. There is no doubt that Carlos Duarte Acosta was conscious of being from a politically-important family with some socially-important members. They were mostly of Portuguese descent, which, in a Portuguese colony, meant that they resembled the upper class, even if they didn't possess great wealth.

Located in the center of Rio de Janeiro, Duarte Costa's family home was fairly modest. Today I believe it's next to a budget hotel. It's an Italian-looking house with a terrace, fairly modest but certainly part of the historic ruling class of Brazil.

Perhaps the most important figure in young Carlos' life was his maternal uncle, Eduardo Duarte da Silva, who was a bishop. He was a priest at the time of Carlos' birth and infancy, then he was consecrated by the pope, which was a rare honor at the time. Under the mentorship of his beloved uncle, the young Carlos was sent to Rome, to study at the Latin American college. He spent the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Italy and was there until about 1905. It must have been quite an experience, perhaps even a shock, for this young boy – who lived a fairly sheltered existence and had only known the year-round sunshine of Rio de Janeiro – to experience the cold of Rome in the winter! At the turn of the century, even the Latin American college would have been quite a shock for these young Latin American children, suddenly finding themselves so far from home and in such a strange environment.

As luck would have it, this was not a peaceful period in Italian history. This was a time of enormous social upheaval. Karl Marx died in 1883 and his original Marxist message of power and democracy for workers was just beginning to take hold, as the authoritarian "old guard" was beginning to lose its grip of Europe. A relatively-young soldier, King Umberto I of Italy was militaristic and authoritarian. Fairly new, Italy was unified as a country only 24 years before his reign, and he was now bent on crushing Marxism and anarchy. He daily marched his soldiers through the streets of Rome, sometimes turning them on the crowds. There was a series of massacres. At that time, the Latin American college was located in the heart of Rome: Imagine what the young Carlos Duarte Costa might have witnessed, peering out of the window and seeing unspeakable things. The political situation was reaching a breaking



point, and King Umberto I was assassinated in 1900—an event that inspired the assassin who pointed his gun at U.S. President William McKinley in 1901.

For unknown reasons related to health, Carlos was sent back to Brazil, where he completed his seminary training and was ordained a priest. He served in a number of churches, then was selected as the bishop of Botucatu, Brazil, at age 35. Being consecrated a bishop was an immense achievement, but Botucatu was not a glamorous diocese, and being sent to the remote “Wild West” of Brazil must have been a disheartening prospect for a boy who had always lived with a certain degree of color and excitement in cities. Add to this the sadness caused by the fact that his mentor and beloved uncle, Bishop Eduardo, who had been at his side and supported him throughout his life, died just a few weeks before the consecration.

By the end of his formative years, Carlos Duarte Acosta, who wanted for nothing and might otherwise have felt privileged and blessed at every turn, had lived through a series of upheavals, interruptions and ill health, surrounded by violence and discord. The death of his very highly-regarded uncle further colored his disappointment and pain.

He was also no doubt influenced by the trajectory of his near-contemporary, Sebastião da Silveira Cintra, who always seemed a step ahead of Duarte Costa, and would later be named an archbishop and cardinal. By the time of Duarte Costa’s consecration, da Silveira Cintra was already the coadjutor bishop of São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro. Duarte Costa, meanwhile, found himself in a poor and poorly-staff outpost, riding around in bullock carts and making do with what he had. It must have been a fairly crushing experience—but he stayed. He didn’t look at the diocese and say, “This isn’t for me. You have the wrong guy!” He was a young man, still in his mid-30s. He was well-liked in the diocese. There are also some suggestions that he wasn’t terribly capable at things like administration and finances. He didn’t have a great deal of support, but he was apparently liked by the people, and he stayed. Without a doubt, his embeddedness in a poor semi-rural community must have shaped him and dramatically opened his eyes.

Though educated in Rome and coming from a political family, with a very successful bishop as his uncle, Duarte Costa was not regarded as a great “rising star.” As intelligent and sensitive as he was, he was fully conscious of living during a time of tumultuous change. We can all relate to that, living as we do during a century of bewildering change. Some of us can remember being “Cold War babies,” with the threat of nuclear war daily on our tongues! Duarte surveyed such uncertainties and

reflected on what he was called to say and do about such uncertainties. From that perspective, it becomes easier to understand his otherwise-confusing decisions in the 1930s. In 1930, Getúlio Vargas seized control of Brazil during a constitutional movement, and Duarte Costa no doubt looked for a way to play a positive role in the political turmoil. The rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe was absolutely not lost on the people of Brazil, who were overwhelmingly European in the 1930s. With a desire to speak for democracy and against oppression, Duarte Costa wanted to be “on the right side of history.” Duarte Costa had seen the centralization of power in the pope and the Vatican, and he was now seeing a terrible parallel in the increasing authoritarianism and centralization of totalitarian powers, like Germany, Italy and Spain. He drew the conclusion that this was not a coincidence: The Roman Catholic Church, as a political institution, was being reflected in the fascism of Mussolini, who now sought to make a pact with the Catholic Church—and the Church, in light of its loss of territory and political standing—was willing to be complicit! Duarte Costa could not yet see the “road to Auschwitz,” but the complicity between the Roman Catholic Church and Nazi fascism was clear.

Neither the government of Brazil nor the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed Duarte Costa’s accusations of fascism, and, though we don’t know what happened behind the scenes, it seems that, after 13 years of leading the Diocese of Botucatu without any great fanfare or aplomb, he was deposed, strongly persuaded or strong-armed into resigning from his position as bishop. Because his political orientation and commitment had become very clear, he may even have been threatened. It may also be the case that the episcopate of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil was attempting to pacify or appease the likes of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and/or Adolf Hitler in Germany. At the time, the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil benefited from what we nowadays call populism. The towering Christ the Redeemer statue was completed in Rio de Janeiro in 1931, and a national holiday was declared, with movie cameras capturing the military bands and marching troops. It’s difficult to argue that the Roman Catholic Church stepped back from such politics—and Duarte Costa decried such apparent fascism. In his estimation, you could be for freedom or fascism—and his choice was extremely clear: He called out fascism and all fascist sympathizers within the Roman Catholic Church!

Regardless, by the end of the 1930s, Duarte Costa had acquired enemies, was out of office, and was unlikely to ever be on the path to another diocese or to another position within the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps like some of our own family members, he was forced to

make terrible choices in order to remain true to who he was. My suspicion is that Carlos Duarte Costa's vocal opposition to authoritarian regimes must have earned him some death threats; his life must have been in danger to some degree by a regime that was quite capable of getting rid of inconvenient people.

Not yet 50 years old, Duarte Costa was quite young when he was forced or tricked into an "early retirement." As a young man without a purpose, he would dedicate the next phase of his life to finding a new purpose. Part of his search for a new purpose was to declare the launch of a new national Catholic church: the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, or ICAB, as it's known by its acronym in Brazil. It seems the earliest mention of this was on his 56<sup>th</sup> birthday, on July 21, 1944, while he was still under house arrest by a government that was still very concerned about the things he said and the positions he took. Some of his fellow Roman Catholic bishops, who were still in office, visited him at his home, and their conversation included the first known suggestions of the launch of a new Brazilian church. The bishops tried to talk him out of it, but he was very clear that he reserved that option, which became a reality in 1945.

That takes us to the establishment of the ICAB. When I first became interested in Duarte Costa, I was rather surprised by the lack of research and documentation—and it could be quite difficult to find it. I started with some old books, and the updating of the historical record became a hobby and a passion for me.

World War II was still in progress when Duarte Costa founded the ICAB, and Brazil's authoritarian government survived the war after joining the Allies. A very tense situation persisted in Brazil.

Carlos Duarte Acosta led his ICAB—the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church—for just under 16 years. I won't cover every year of that 16-year period, but I'll make a couple of comments about the kind of leader that Duarte Costa seemed to be. Like all new organizations, he had many things to deal with. He faced ridicule and opposition from outside. This is quite well documented. He was, of course, called a madman: Every great person at some point is called a crazy person! He faced opposition from inside, since the ICAB didn't meet everyone's expectations, resulting in internal divisions. There were defections to other groups and subgroups. How did Duarte Costa respond? Ironically, he always criticized the other organizations, and he centralized the power within his organization—which might seem enormous from the perspective of the U.K., but which was, practically-speaking, quite small in Brazil. This resilient church claimed some 600,000 people, and Duarte Costa was

aware of what it meant to lead a modest-sized organization served by bishops and priests dotted around a huge country. In the 1950s, one of his former priests criticized Duarte Costa, saying he wasn't the president of a college of bishops, but that he treated all his bishops like priests, telling them what to do. This was a response to a situation where Duarte Costa risked losing control of the church, not a case of power going to Duarte Costa's head. Some suggest that he deliberately chose clergy — all men — who were not men of vast learning and great experience in the Church. He chose former religious, like Franciscan novices and the like. None of us is perfect, and the good news is that this resulted in a liberalization, an opening up of the priesthood. He wondered: Why should we drill, train and interrogate potential clergy for six, seven or eight years? Why should we put them through this mill, when it doesn't guarantee perfect clergy at the end of the process? Large, international churches, like the Anglican Communion or the Roman Catholic Church, have begun to understand this in recent decades. Duarte Costa was "ahead of the curve" in understanding this, and he opened the priesthood to a bi-vocational priesthood: to working people with day jobs, who felt a calling, particularly at older ages than Roman Catholic seminarians, and who didn't see ministry as a career.

During his 16 years of leadership, Duarte Costa never succeeded in establishing a permanent seminary, and this has been a difficult challenge for the Brazilian Church ever since. Those who want to organize seminaries are faced with immense costs and logistics, and a traditional seminary formation was not part of the ICAB's ethos, which focused more on "learning on the job," learning by doing, which is likely the best, most holistic and practical way of learning. It seems that Duarte Costa recruited men with a certain level of learning, then equipped them with a certain level of catechesis. Just as the thought of paying his priests was never going to be a reality, so, too, the idea of running a costly seminary was not an option for Duarte Costa.

You might wonder how he dealt with those seeking Holy Orders for self-aggrandizement. From the earliest days of the ICAB, when newspapers reported that this Roman Catholic bishop had started his own venture and was ordaining working men, there were people who flocked to him and no doubt shared that they felt a call to the priesthood. In some cases, I believe that Duarte Costa was taken in by such stories. In the simplest sense, he was a good person who was open to a sob story! He listened to people's experiences and traumas, and he gave them a lot of chances — second, third, fourth and fifth chances! He was an idealist,

and he only performed about a dozen consecrations during those 16 years – with several others attributed to him that can't be verified.

We have no proof that Duarte Costa was influenced by the French worker priest movement, but he was certainly aware of similar models of ministry by the priests who served in the Spanish Civil War and who organized various resistance movements. The downside, of course, was a certain tendency towards disorganization, defection and disappointment at times. It wasn't complete chaos, but it did result in an organization that needed some centralization and reining in. The irony is that he was so against centralization and authoritarian approaches, and he was saying: This is not anarchy; we are an institution with rules and responsibilities – and I am the founder and head of this church! That became his leadership style.

Sadly, Duarte Costa didn't keep a diary, and the records are sparse, so we don't have a lot to go on, but the launch of his new church did energize the Independent Catholic movement. It led to similar organizations with a similar ethos and a similar democratization or opening up of the priesthood and the sacramental life of the Church. Whether or not you agree with Duarte Costa, in some ways he paved the way for even greater participation in the Independent Catholic movement, including women's ordination and wider participation in the Church by people of different language groups, ethnic groups, lifestyle choices and occupations. Duarte Costa's legacy has allowed us to further push those boundaries.

As we suggested earlier, Duarte Costa was probably not the best administrator. He wasn't very practical with figures and office work. We don't get the sense that he engaged in "business planning" for his new church. He was an idealist, and he relied on priests who had "day jobs" – so there just wasn't a motivation for planning. He focused more on the ethos of the ICAB and its positive contribution to the world.

Duarte Costa lived to be 72 years old. He died on Palm Sunday in 1961 – which means that he missed the Second Vatican Council, where so many of his reforms, like liturgy in the vernacular, were discussed. I imagine he would have felt some vindication had he lived to witness Vatican II. The fight over succession within the ICAB began while he was still alive – and it could not have been pleasant. Very shortly before his death, in the hope of maintaining a succession and avoiding a battle, he appointed a successor.

What are we to make of the suggestion that Duarte Costa might be a saint for the Independent Catholic movement? We have to handle sainthood with care. We know that the universe of saints that we have

met and known during our lifetimes are not always considered saints while they're living, and we'll never know if those who have passed are truly saints, but we can evidence veneration and great devotion, which is certainly the case with Carlos Duarte Costa. To this day, he continues to inspire and be a positive force. While I personally wouldn't risk declaring anyone a saint, I can certainly understand why some people might refer to Duarte Costa as a patron saint of the Independent Catholic movement. I can certainly see that, and I would certainly espouse that. In Latin America, we find a great deal of veneration of him. The ICAB radio station, which runs 24/7, features songs written about him. So, there is certainly an active and lively veneration of him that is taking place.

We conclude with the question of why Independent Catholic communities and churches are not better known. Why are they not more highly regarded? Why do we find ourselves having to explain to people what it is, sharing our "lift pitch" [elevator speech]? There are a few reasons for that. Let's start with the most difficult one: Ridicule and opposition persist. In my fairly-limited experience of academic life, academic theology departments wonder whether Independent Catholicism can be treated as "real" theology? They wonder: Is it really a thing? Does it even exist? This results in a mixture of resistance and cynicism, which flow from a lack of awareness about the topic. There's a low-level, knee-jerk attitude of resistance to Independent Catholicism: It sounds a bit funny and not entirely respectable. The draw of large institutions has a powerful effect on human beings who yearn for a sense of belonging and who crave being part of something so large. Apart from this resistance, the scholarship produced by members of the Independent Catholic community has been quite slow in taking off. We see some momentum happening with books and blogs, podcasts and social media, but let's be honest: Independent Catholicism has been really quite slow to take off. We need more works, more great theses and books on this, which is good for the movement and for the faith. Independent Catholicism provides new perspectives and encouragement for future generations of Catholics. We can't do without writing forever: Religions organize before their scriptures are written—the Church comes before the Bible—but our "scriptures" spring from the experience of the community. There comes a point when we, as a community, have to start looking for ways to transmit and communicate what we're doing and what's going on!

**Reflections on  
From Renegade Roman Catholic Bishop  
to Independent Catholic Saint:  
Carlos Duarte Costa**

L. Walker: You are so deeply immersed in the history of Carlos Duarte Costa, and I'm just beginning to skim the surface! In your estimation, what are the principal characteristics of the church that he founded and attempted to bring forth? Am I correct in thinking that the "worker priest" model was definitely part of it?

Jarvis: That was certainly an important aspect of the ICAB.

L. Walker: Can we assume a married priesthood and liturgy in the vernacular were important to him?

Jarvis: Absolutely. I would briefly generalize other elements of the ICAB, including a full appreciation of the national culture. The indigenous music of Brazil has been passed down by a population that descended from African slaves, with their own traditions, customs, dress, musical styles and instruments. Duarte Costa welcomed all of that. The worship and culture of the Brazilian Church fully appreciated such elements of the national spirit – but there was no normative, set culture in the ICAB, as in the Roman Church.

Ellis: I am a priest with the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, otherwise known as CACINA, and you have some kind words for CACINA in your book, *Carlos Duarte Costa: Testament of a Socialist Bishop*, which is common reading for CACINA priests. You write:

Good examples of Independent Catholicism, therefore, are those that are deliberately inclined toward people who are in some way marginalized, both Catholics and non-Catholics, and, regardless of whether being Catholic is a factor in their marginalization or not, this can clearly be seen as an extension of the example of Duarte Costa, who challenged issues of celibacy, divorce and religious freedom issues that Rome does not want or has not always wanted to address. Many examples can be found in the story of CACINA, the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, whose

name is deliberately reminiscent of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil. CACINA, in fact, traces its origins back to 1949, when the Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil ordained Bishop Estefan Meyer Corradi, to establish a branch of the ICAB there. CACINA has been described as including people who wish to worship in the Catholic tradition, but not in the Roman Catholic Church. Of special importance to the church is letting people know that everyone is welcome, regardless of race, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or economic status.

Thank you for those very kind words, which are reminiscent of Duarte Costa's vision. I have three questions. CACINA's relationship to the Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil is, in some ways, not terribly dissimilar from the Episcopal Church's relationship with the Church of England: Specifically, CACINA tends to be more progressive in its sacramental theology and its inclusion of LGBTQ folk and women. Based upon your deep understanding of the spirit of Duarte Costa, can you opine on what he might feel about what CACINA has been doing for many years, which is opening the sacraments to all persons in the service of sacramental justice?

Jarvis: Thank you for your kind words. I'm pleased to know that the book is of such interest. I've asked myself this question as well: What would Duarte Costa say about CACINA? It's a difficult question, for obvious reasons. He was a man who was born in 1888, and he led ICAB for a relatively short tenure. The steps that he took to open up the priesthood and to free up liturgical expression tend to indicate that he was on a trajectory and that these were issues for him at the time. Could we predict that, if he had lived longer or if he could be transported in a time machine to see what is happening in churches like CACINA today, he would approve? With the momentum we see in his life, I think there's a fair chance. Taking into account where he came from, when he was born, and how far he moved from the norm during his fairly-short tenure, I think he was moving in such a direction and that he could have gone a lot farther.



- Ellis: It certainly seems that Duarte Costa was in many ways, as you allude, a man of his time. In other ways, he was decidedly ahead of his time, as in his foreshadowing of the themes of Vatican II. In your book, *Testament of a Socialist Bishop*, Duarte Costa had a great deal to say about land reform—and he did so in essentially theological terms. He said that the land does not belong to anyone—or ought not to belong to anyone—that it is God’s gift to everyone, and that we have an obligation to be stewards of it. In what sense, would you agree with that statement, and can you elaborate on that? Would he be considered an environmentalist today?
- Jarvis: For the reasons you just outlined, I certainly agree that he could be called an environmentalist today. Land reform was a huge issue of concern in Brazil, and he didn’t have the environmentalist terminology, so he spoke of it through theological tools and his political know-how. Duarte Costa never pretended to be anything more than he was, and his manifesto still makes some very poignant points. You mentioned the Second Vatican Council: If you really want to get a shiver down your spine, read Paul VI’s 1967 apostolic letter, *Populorum Progressio*. It almost seems copied from Duarte Costa’s manifesto 20 years earlier! Strangely, you might say that the hand of God was at work: *Populorum Progressio* was published exactly six years to the day that Duarte Acosta passed away. Whether there’s some meaning in that, I don’t know, but it’s an enormous irony, really, that so many of these ideas, including the ones that you mentioned, really did reach fulfillment in Vatican II texts.
- Ellis: My final question concerns Bishop Salomão Barbosa Ferraz, a curious person in a cast of curious characters, who has the distinction of being perhaps the only person in history to have been received into the Roman Catholic Church as a full bishop never having been Roman Catholic himself. Can you talk about him?
- Jarvis: He is indeed an interesting character, and Rome recognized his orders and did not require subconditional consecration—and he was never a Catholic before Rome received him! That, in a sense, was his salvation, because he had never broken canon law. He was from a Presbyterian background, then spent some time in the Episcopal Church and then in another

independent Protestant church. After founding his own church, he joined Duarte Costa's ICAB. He was never baptized a Catholic, and only Roman Catholics are subjected to Roman Catholic canon law. When Duarte Costa ordained and consecrated Barbosa Ferraz without a papal mandate and against the express wishes of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, Duarte Costa committed an offense under canon law—but the Roman Catholic canon law did not apply to Barbosa Ferraz! When he presented himself at almost 80 years old to the Roman Catholic Church and said, "I want to join, and, by the way, I'm also a bishop," they looked favorably upon him for finding Holy Mother Church. It's definitely a fascinating case of an unusual man. The irony is that former Roman Catholics are refused re-entry into the Roman Catholic Church in the vast majority of cases because they have contravened canon law. This is obviously difficult to get around.

Ellis: I believe it's referred to as a "permanent irregularity."

Jarvis: What a horrible, terrible phrase! I see a question in the chatbox regarding the size of Duarte Costa's ecclesial community. We know with a fair amount of certainty that his church claimed to have about 600,000 adherents on paper. Numbers are a very difficult thing to establish in many churches, with people coming and going all the time: As three people come in the front door, four people leave out the back door! I certainly wouldn't enjoy the task of trying to establish exactly how many members there are.

Mathias: I'm wondering if you might be able to tell us if there is an unbroken chain that goes back from any present manifestation of the ICAB, to Duarte Costa. That is, when I attended the Utrecht summer school in 2019, I understood Bishop Diogo Bonioli of Brazil to suggest that there was some doubt concerning such an unbroken chain—and that he asserted to the archbishop of Utrecht that he and his jurisdiction had the documentation to "prove" that they were the legitimate heirs of Duarte Costa's ecclesial legacy. Is there any question in your mind with respect to an unbroken chain of succession from Duarte Costa to the ICAB of today?

Jarvis: I don't really doubt the direct line from Duarte Costa to the ICAB. There are very few degrees of separation in so few generations, and I wouldn't want to cast judgment on every consecration and ordination. Most of the lines that claim to lead back to Duarte Costa likely do.

It's been a real pleasure to be with you today, I've enjoyed it enormously. I hope that this presentation has been helpful and informative!

**Dubious Theology, Suspicious Pseudo-science  
or Diverse Expressions of Church?  
A Conversation on Esotericism  
in the Independent Sacramental Movement**

Most Rev. Alan Kemp  
Most Rev. Lewis Keizer

Mathias: For those of us who come from mainline traditions of the Church, we may be less familiar with various strands of esotericism that come to us from the early Church. I entered seminary at age 18 and was ordained by the Roman Catholic Church ten years later, and I'll readily admit that my formation and education contained nothing remotely related to esotericism—except perhaps of our learning of various heresies and spiritual movements that were condemned by the Roman Church. It was only two years ago, when I edited Bishop David Oliver Kling's first volume of *Sacramental Whine*, that my eyes were opened to some very different beliefs—so different, in fact, that I wrestled with the question of whether I could make copies of Kling's book available at Holy Family, where folks solidly self-identify as Catholic. Last month, as we worked to publish *Tradition and Adaptation*, such esoteric strands within our movements were referenced as—and I hesitate to repeat the words—the “kooky fringe” of our movement. We do well to interrogate our attitudes toward diverse expressions of faith and spirituality, which likely mirror to us the diversity of the early Church, from an era before the Roman Empire's push toward uniformity of religious belief and practice. I'm reminded of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century German maxim, which has wrongly been attributed to St. Augustine: “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.” So, let's charitably discuss various diverse elements of the larger Independent Sacramental Movement of which we are part! Please join me in welcoming Archbishop Alan Kemp of the Ascension Alliance, who will introduce our guest this evening.

Kemp: It's my pleasure to introduce Bishop Lewis Keizer. He earned his Master of Divinity from the Episcopal Divinity School at Cambridge in 1968, and his Ph.D. from the

Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in 1973. He decided to leave the Episcopal Church, in order to affiliate with Archbishop Herman Adrian Spruit, one of the pioneers of the Independent Catholic movement in this nation, who had quite an interest and background in esoteric studies. We'll speak more about him next week.

Keizer: I was clandestinely consecrated by Mr. Spruit in 1975. There were some questions about his intention, and he was an unstable man, with several problems, including emotional problems, so Bishop George Boyer from London came over and re-consecrated or "subconditionally" consecrated me, so that there would be no question about my consecration.

Kemp: One thing I know about you, Lewis, is that you are a multi-talented person: You've written a number of books with an esoteric bent, you are a jazz musician, cornetist, and the former conductor of the Santa Cruz Chamber Orchestra. You're also a sailor, and you have sailed from the San Francisco Bay area to Baja California. Lewis, we understand that you have prepared a presentation on the esotericism that characterizes some parts of our movement.

Keizer: This evening, we'll consider faith in its esoteric dimensions and meaning. The first thing we need to understand is that the early Christians did not consider faith to be a matter of belief. The early Christians didn't create creeds or statements of belief. The first creeds were not formalized until the fourth century. Before that, early "creeds" more closely resembled an affirmation of *Yeshua ha-Mashiah*, that Jesus is Lord. We find that statement in the earliest epistles of Paul.

The early Christians, however, were persecuted and hated by the general population. The Roman government really didn't want to persecute Christians, but Trajan, the Emperor, asked Pliny the Younger what crime Christians could be charged with. We still have Pliny's response: "They were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft or adultery, nor falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so." That is one of the earliest statements of the faith, of the faithfulness of early Christians to virtues observed by all good people, including

Jewish Christians. Their faith retained the Aramaic sense of virtuous action and was expressed as faithfulness to virtue, not to a belief system. It was similar to the vows taken in mystery religions, like the Eleusinian mysteries. The Aramaic word *emunah* (אמונה), which did not mean “belief,” was translated as *pistos* (πιστός) in the New Testament, but the actual words of Jesus—or Yeshua—do not contain any statements of faith or belief. Yeshua encouraged people to act with fidelity to God’s ways. For me, Jimmy Carter is a very good reminder that Christianity is, at its root and from its beginning, a practice, and not a declaration of faith. Your faith is not something you believe; it’s something you do! People have forgotten that: They think that faith is a statement of belief. *Emunah* means “faithfulness” or “fidelity.” It’s how you act, react and lead your life, keeping faith with God’s ways, which were attributed to the Ten *Sephiroth*, emanated by God at creation and depicted on the Hebrew Tree of Life 200 years before Jesus. They were considered to be the basic elements of the universe.

200 years before Yeshua, rabbis shared legends, like the *Sefer Yetzirah*, an oral *haggadah* of the second or third century B.C. This was the *kabbalistic* explanation for the origin of evil in a world created by *Abba*, the good and perfect Godhead. We think of it as “creation,” but it was actually emanation. The story is told by Basilides in great detail. Bishop Spruit liked to tell the story. In the beginning, there was nothing, the *Ain*, the “not.” Then God created unlimited thought, the *Ain Soph* or “not-limited.” God spoke the Word of creation, which was *AUM*, the *Ain Soph Aur* that created limitless light in the universe. That emanated *Kether*, *Hochmah* and *Binah*, the “Crown,” “Wisdom” and “Compassion,” the triune virtues from which all other things emanate. They, in turn, emanated the archetypal world of the Ten *Sephiroth* and the 22 paths, of which the lowest and farthest from God is the *Malkuth*, where we exist. These Vessels are isolated from each other and cannot communicate as a system, so God shattered the Vessels and put them into inter-communication through the 22 Paths of Wisdom. This produced the “prolapsed tree,” which contains the shards or broken husks of the Vessels, which, according to this legend, became dark forces that coexist, intermixed with the light,

and are the voids or forces of negativity and opposition to unity, love, health and intelligence. During the medieval period, cathedral floors were checkered, black and white, to symbolize that the forces of good and evil are always present with each other.

Yeshua, the Jesus of history, knew the story, which is why he said, “Let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest” and many other things like that. For Yeshua, faith was faithfulness to the divine qualities of Wisdom, Mercy, Truth, Justice and all the eternal realities that existed in human hearts, but the good *yetzerim* or impulses, which is the way they were described by Jewish mystics, exist in opposition to the evil *yetzerim* in an ongoing internal and external struggle that goes on within about the struggle is both internal and external. Paul referred to faith as “shadowboxing” to prepare for real attacks and handling real encounters with evil in life. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus said, “The Kingdom (*malkuth*) of the Father-Mother (*Abba*) is like a certain man who wanted to kill a powerful man in his own house. He drew his sword and stuck it into the wall, in order to find out whether his hand could carry through. Then he slew the powerful man.” Most scholars agree that this is an authentic *logion* or saying of Yeshua from the Gospel of Thomas. Faith(fulness) is the practice of preparing oneself to defend the defenseless – not to defend or promote one’s own beliefs.

In the Testament of Reuben (1:13 ff.), which Yeshua undoubtedly knew, and which describes the esoteric, internal struggle of good and evil, of faith and faithfulness, there are seven spirits, plus an eighth power of the divine image, that have been put into our hearts. There’s the power of Love, which has is countered by or is opposed by the power of the Lust. They’re all associated with different bodily senses, and the idea is that the evil *yetzer* attempts to corrupts the good *yetzer*, and the struggle of faith or faithfulness is to support the good *yetzer* and to suppress the evil *yetzer*, which is always there.

In his epistle, which is likely authentic, James says, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” The esoteric qualities of faith or faithfulness are,

in their original meaning, not belief. It is what we do to keep the eternal virtues that God has put into our hearts.

Smith: I understand that, by the time of the 200s and 300s, much of this was rejected by the early Church, and that they were deemed to be a blending of pagan and Christian concepts, leaving us to believe in a very different view of God.

Keizer: We find in scriptures such ideas as multiple gods, and of lower gods creating all things, and of a god that created evil. In the Gospel of Thomas, for instance, Yeshua said that there are not two or three gods, but that one Father-Mother God, *Abba*, created all things, good and evil. That was the belief of the early Christians, but it was not the belief of Gnostics and Valentinians.

Smith: If I hear you correctly, would Jewish Christians validate the idea of a mother goddess?

Keizer: Paul used the word *Abba* when he quoted some of the earliest Christian hymns to Jewish-Christian churches. The word *Abba* is not *Ab*, which means “father,” but *Abba*, which means a “motherly father.” I translate *Abba* as “Father-Mother,” to relay that sense of the femininity of the Godhead in the word *Abba*. It was understood that way in Judaism for a long time before Yeshua.

Kemp: I have the impression from one of the comments in the chatbox that there is some confusion between esotericism and Gnosticism. Gnosticism is, of course, one esoteric approach, but could you speak to that and clarify that for us?

Keizer: My research and interest focus on reclaiming the authentic, original, historical teachings of Yeshua from the many documents and manuscripts we have, including the Gospel of Thomas, which is not really a Gnostic document, though some of its sayings have been “Gnosticized” and altered. The same is true of the New Testament: Many of the words attributed to Jesus were altered to reflect the ideas of late first-century Christianity. I don’t think Gnosticism was capable of really understanding the teachings of Yeshua about faith or faithfulness. If you read Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* or the sayings that were attributed to the daughters of the apostle Philip, which were too late to be included in the New Testament, they develop the ideas of



Gnostics like Valentinus and Marcion. James Hamlyn Hill reconstructs the New Testament used by Marcion, which resembled the Gospel of Luke. Marcion was classified as a Gnostic and promoted Valentinian thought. We'll find in such words ideas of fidelity and faithfulness, but not "faith," as we understand that word today, with its ties to creed and belief.

- Kemp: Esotericism is sometimes contrasted with exotericism. Could you explain the difference between esoteric and exoteric approaches to religion?
- Keizer: Esoteric approaches to religion are not often useful, since they are clouded by various doctrines that have emerged in Gnosticism, which is different from proto-orthodox Christianity. An exoteric view of Christianity is probably the safest way to look at it: We can look at the writings of the Church Fathers and Philo of Alexandria, and we can see how Yeshua himself related to various Jewish ideas. One esoteric idea of religion that is promoted by Jewish mysticism is the idea of a God who is worshiped as a lover. Yeshua used this imagery when he spoke of the bride chamber, of the divine wedding or marriage.
- Mathias: Presuming that esoteric traditions are not monolithic, is the cosmology that you share generally shared by various persons who espouse and or practice esotericism within our movement? Also, in your estimation, how widespread might esotericism be within Independent Catholicism and/or within the larger Independent Sacramental Movement?
- Keizer: Herman Spruit certainly embraced this kind of esotericism or mysticism. Others within our movement might include Torkom Saraydarian and Rosamunde Miller. They understood mysticism in this way, and in the weddings she celebrated, Rosamunde always read sections from Psalms and Proverbs about the Lover and the Beloved.
- Kemp: You've mentioned some people with whom esotericism in our movement has been associated, like Herman and Meri Spruit. Perhaps a better question might be: How important do you think esotericism is to the movement?

Keizer: I'm not sure that I would associate Meri Pruitt with esotericism. Herman was interested in all these things. I don't know how many bishops use such a mystical approach to the faith.

Kemp: David Oliver Kling, one of the bishops in the movement is very interested in esotericism, and he hosts a podcast called "Sacramental Whine," where he speaks with a lot of people who are esoterically-oriented. I know that Father Jayme wondered just how ordinary people in the pews might make sense of the words of those who describe themselves as esoteric, things that might otherwise sound "far out there" or—I don't mean to be offensive—things that might sound "wacky." How might a "cradle Catholic" make sense of some of the things they hear on "Sacramental Whine"?

Keizer: I'm not sure that I could comment on that.

Kemp: Lewis, what do you think is important for us to understand about esotericism and the kinds of things that you teach?

Keizer: I don't consider my research to be esoteric. I'm not sure that esotericism is a valid quest for us. A valid quest for us is to understand and observe the historical teachings of Yeshua, rather than create new rationales for new theologies. I don't like theology; I like history, and many of the people who contact me are interested in history: They want to know more about the historical Yeshua.

Kemp: It sounds like you don't consider yourself to be an esotericist *per se*.

Keizer: No.

Kemp: But you would say that Herman Adrian Spruit was an esotericist, interested in a variety of teachings that are not mainstream?

Keizer: I hadn't thought about him in that way. Herman Spruit was a recordkeeper. When I first moved to Pacific Grove, a church in Cambria, California had burned down, and Herman rescued all the records that they had. He gave me copies of those records, which I included in my book, *Wandering Bishops*. There were a lot of priests—"lap dogs," I called them—who would have done anything for Spruit to make them a bishop. One of them came to me when I was

the dean of admissions and curriculum at a small, six-year college in Seaside, California, and he wanted us to include in our curriculum something that Herman Spruit had created for the Sophia Divinity School, so that students could receive credit from us.

Kemp: Lewis, is there any relationship between esotericism and Jewish mysticism or *kabbalah*?

Keizer: Kabbalah is esoteric, and I've written a book called the *Kabbalistic Teachings of Yeshua in the Gospel of Thomas*, which mostly contains authentic *logion*, though some are slightly altered. They're all kabbalistic, which means that they were given from the mouth of the teacher, to the ear of the student. That's what *kabbal* means. Kabbalism took on different meanings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was originally just the interpretation of the Jewish Old Testament, as Jewish sages understood it. I shared with you one example, the *Testament of Reuben*, which was a kabbalistic interpretation of parts of the Old Testament. Kabbalah simply means an oral teaching given from the mouth of the teacher to the ear of the student.

Kemp: The concepts of Jewish mysticism have always appealed to me, and I'm aware of the different ways that scriptures are interpreted in that tradition. Perhaps the mystical interpretations of scriptures are closest to what some people might think of as esotericism.

Keizer: Early Christians were influenced by those Jewish concepts. Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, written in the second century, describes the different methods of interpreting not just the Old Testament, but also passages from the New Testament.

Kemp: When I studied at Sophia Divinity School, we inherited a lot of Herman's work, which Meri had organized. She was very interested in a sort of theosophical approach to Kabbalah. That really didn't touch me, but I discovered the work of Rabbi David A. Cooper, who wrote *God Is a Verb*, which explains Jewish mysticism to those who may not have a very strong background in it. He likes to say, "A mystic is a mystic": A Jewish mystic can relate to a Christian mystic, who can relate to a Sufi mystic, who can relate to a Buddhist mystic. Mysticism is simply a way of interpreting that which is believed to come from the Divine! I'm at a disadvantage

because I never met Herman, but I understand that he was interested in different esoteric approaches to understanding our experience with the Divine. I recognize that can be a little confusing for people who are deeply interested in the faith but don't necessarily have a theological bent. I don't consider myself an esotericist, but I'm not averse to looking at things from a mystical point of view. It seems that Yeshua was also very mystical.

Keizer: Yes, he was. He often spoke to his disciples in parables.

Kemp: I wonder if he did so in an attempt to initiate his disciples into a more esoteric understanding of the Divine.

Mathias: Those of us who come from larger, mainstream traditions are likely less familiar with other, less-common beliefs, beliefs that we wouldn't hear in mainstream traditions. I, for instance, learned this evening about the *Testament of Reuben*. I don't recall John Meier speaking of Jesus' knowledge of such works in his series on the historical Jesus. Bishop Keizer, you asserted that "Yeshua undoubtedly knew" of this work. Are there other works that Yeshua might have known, that we might not hear about from mainstream authors like John Meier?

Keizer: The *Testament of Reuben* was written in the second-century B.C., too late to be included in the Old Testament, but it was a sacred text that was read in homes. There were also Testaments attributed to other sons of Jacob. You can google other pseudepigraphal works from that intertestamental period.

Robison: The more recent scholarship that I have read on the *Sefer Yetzirah* suggests that, though it may have been passed down orally, it wasn't put down in writing and codified until at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. — not 200 years before Jesus. I'm having a hard time reconciling such hard, historical scholarship with what you've said. Did I misunderstand you?

Keizer: You didn't you misunderstood me at all. As you suggest, the *Sefer Yetzirah* was an oral tradition, and some Jewish scholars suggest that it dates to at least 200 B.C. You are correct in stating that it wasn't written down or codified until much later.

Robison: It's pretty clear that there's no consensus on the dating of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, but some suggest that they were a Christian creation, perhaps from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. or later.

Keizer: The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* were transmitted by Christians. The Testament of Isaiah was probably the first to be written, and it was created by Christians, but it was based on much earlier material.

Ellis: This has been a fascinating exploration of important points of contact between Christianity and esotericism, or, for lack of a better word, of early Christian mysticism, Gnosticism, and what would might otherwise be thought of as "orthodoxy." There are writers and traditions in early Christian Gnosticism and esotericism that are very problematic for what would be regarded as "orthodoxy," and there are also folks on the "orthodox" sort of end of the spectrum who are problematic for early Christian Gnosticism. How problematic, for example, might Irenaeus of Lyons be? He wrote in the early second century. He was taught by Polycarp, and we know that there is an orthodox tradition of Polycarp being taught by St. John the Evangelist. I'm thinking particularly of Irenaeus' work, *Against Heresies*. How problematic is someone like Irenaeus for the shaping and valuing of these other early traditions, like the Gnosticism that he condemned?

Keizer: They would consider his words to be a biased attack on them.

Kemp: As an historian, I understand, Lewis, that you are interested in the authentic teachings of Yeshua, some of which come from sources outside the scriptural canon. Though he was familiar with other gospels, Irenaeus was bent on limiting the canon to four gospels that were commonly used in various churches at that particular point in time.

Keizer: Textual evidence indicates how long it took for the gospels to develop into the form that we have today. At the time that the creeds were developed, the scriptures were still in flux. Most scholars, for instance, think that the Gospel of Luke was much shorter, some two-thirds of what it is today. Often

in footnotes, scholars note the additions that have been made over time.

Ellis: Bishop Lewis, I so appreciated your reminder that Christianity is a practice. It's something we do. It strikes me that people say that they are a "practicing Jew" or a "practicing Catholic." We don't often hear people describe themselves as practicing Baptists, Lutherans or Presbyterians. That points to one historical association of Catholicism with Judaism, as something that we do and not simply something to which we adhere.

Mathias: Bishop Keizer, the placeholder subtitle that we gave to this presentation included the words, "suspicious pseudo-science." We were hoping to have with us this evening a bishop from the Liberal Catholic Church tradition. One bishop from their tradition recently posted on social media about the "energy transfer" that occurs in ordinations and consecrations. On one of your slides, Bishop Keizer, you shared an image reminiscent of chakras, which caused me to think of that post. I'm wondering if you and/or others might help to shed light on how it is that persons who come to our movement from mainstream religious traditions and/or who view the world through the lens of contemporary science might think of such ideas.

Keizer: In lots of Protestant and Catholic traditions, there is a concept of energy transfer in such actions as ordinations and healing. Sometimes this energy even knocks them backwards! I've read that, in some churches, when they practice such "healing," they often have a few "plants" in the audience, people who fake being "slain in the Spirit" to get things going.

Kemp: I appreciate you making a connection with the Liberal Catholic Church. Herman and Meri were also interested in the Liberal Catholic Church, and a former presiding bishop of that tradition, Charles Leadbetter, wrote a book, *The Science of the Sacraments*, which spoke about energy transfer, particularly within the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. I'm personally not a big fan of Charles Leadbetter, but we have a bishop in the Ascension Alliance, Michael Adams, who is much more knowledgeable about Charles Leadbetter's work. If you're interested in an esoteric understanding of the

Eucharist, I recommend it. *The Science of the Sacraments* is an interesting, esoteric take on the idea of energy transfer, particularly within the celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Keizer: Herman Pruitt very much liked that book. Leadbetter's book actually speaks a lot about the influence of angels in the Eucharist. The Catholic tradition is filled with visual representations of angels at the Eucharist!

Furr: That book is really fascinating, as are his theories on energy transference and how energy is manipulated and moved during the liturgy.

Keizer: We speak of the "host of witnesses" during the Eucharist, which includes not only the living and the dead, but angelic and other beings!

Kemp: In terms of energy transfer, I'm thinking of various scriptural references, like the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' cloak. That would certainly qualify as an energy transfer – or, at least, we could interpret it in that way.

Keizer: Yeshua supposedly said, "I felt virtue or power go out of me."

Kemp: Bishop Leonard writes in the chatbox about the people within the charismatic movement who are "slain in the Spirit" – and how one or two "plants" in the audience who suggest that something supernatural is going on can induce a sort of hypnosis for others who "catch onto" this.

Keizer: It's like "priming the pump," which doesn't diminish the real experiences of people.

L. Walker: For many years, I was the bishop's official liaison to the Charismatic Renewal. To speak of "energy transfer" within that movement would border on heresy. I've led many services where people are "slain in the Spirit" – and no, we don't put phonies up to promote it! There are instances of people being influenced by the example of others: There was a Pentecostal minister who once made his entire congregation go down! I definitely experience a mystical moment during the great elevation of the Eucharist. It's my favorite moment of the mass, when Christ is elevated and brought before the throne of the Father, when we are joined

by all the archangels, angels and saints, and all who've gone before us! Such language moves me to a greater appreciation of our union with one another—but I'm very skittish and uncomfortable with the language of "energy transfer." I may be wrong, but it sounds like a very modern concept.

Kemp: You make a good point: It probably doesn't happen in the Catholic Charismatic movement, but I recall an award-winning documentary, "Marjoe," an exposé of Marjoe Gortner and the Pentecostal movement. I recall the audience members who pretended to be "slain in the Spirit," in order to contribute to the overall emotional experience of the audience. That's certainly an element of the Pentecostal movement.

Keizer: We hear the gospel story of power going out of Jesus, but we have to ask ourselves: Did Yeshua really say that, or was it later added by someone who believed in such a power transfer? The placebo effect is a similar phenomenon in medicine, where people believe that they received a medicine that will benefit them. Belief itself can be powerful—but the basis of our faith must be action, not belief!

Kemp: It's probably not uncommon for priests to go home and take a nap after mass because of the "energy transfer" that happens during the mass: It seems that a hell of a lot of energy goes through priests when they celebrate the Eucharist!

Furr: I totally agree with that.

Kemp: I notice it at other times, too: that there's an energy that flows through us. It's one of the most marvelous experiences we can have: feeling that we're "in the Spirit"!

L. Walker: That *is* the Spirit, which is why I'm uncomfortable using the language of energy, which seems to take away from the power of the Holy Spirit. For anyone who truly ministers to others, being "drained" is a very real thing! The word "energy," in this case, really offends me.

Keizer: The language that Jesus used when he felt "drained" was *dynamis* (δύναμις), which is the Greek root for "dynamic" and "dynamite." In the hermetic literature, when the teacher



takes the student up to the Eighth Heaven, the student replies, "I felt the *dunamis* go out of me." This was a first-century Hebrew concept, which differed from our notions of "energy." It was believed that there was a power from a higher source that flowed from one person to another.

L. Walker: I recall a very powerful, life-changing moment when I attended a large healing conference in the late 1970s at Oral Roberts University. I had come to a point where I had totally rejected God, but, because I was wearing a collar, they invited me on stage and asked me to lay hands on a woman. I did, and she was "slain in the Spirit." Feeling that force, that power really changed my life. I knew it was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kemp: I, too, have had authentic, direct experiences of the Divine, which I attribute to the Holy Spirit. Mysticism begins with those direct, life-changing experiences of God!

Keizer: And if I were to share a final word, it would be this: Faith is not belief. Faith is faithfulness. Faith is fidelity.

**Married Priests Now!**  
**A Conversation on the Life & Legacy of Emmanuel Milingo**

Rev. Mike Lopez

Lopez: As we begin, let's see what we already know about Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo and "Married Priests Now!" What do you know about Archbishop Milingo?

Quintana: I remember the whole controversy of his departure from the Roman Church, including his own marriage and his promotion of married priests and bishops. Then he consecrated other men to carry on the movement. The Roman Church tried to make him look crazy. Their publicity suggested that he was rebellious or mentally unstable.

L. Walker: If I remember correctly, he was initially associated with healing ministries that began to go a little more far afield, which allowed others to paint him as "off-the-wagon" and involved in African spiritualism.

Kemp: My memories are consistent with that.

Lopez: Bishop Emmanuel Milingo was born on June 13, 1930 in Mnukwa, Zambia. He was ordained a priest in August 1958, and he was called by Pope Pius VI to the Roman Catholic episcopacy in 1969, to serve as archbishop of Lusaka. At age 39, he was one of the world's youngest bishops. The Roman Church was booming in Africa at the time. Like many of us, he was formed from a very young age in the Church. He resigned from his diocese 14 years later, in 1983. We can only speculate about the reasons. The African expression of the faith was very different from many other expressions, particularly the European expression of our faith—and Bishop Milingo was very attracted to this African expression, which included liturgical drumming and dancing and the incorporation of African traditions and rituals. The Roman Catholic hierarchy was confused by some of this and labeled some clergy as "savage priests." From the earliest days of his priesthood, Milingo was also known to perform group exorcisms and healing liturgies, and the Polish Jesuits in Zambia brought him a lot of heat for this. He was very outspoken, very partisan, and very much informed by the

Charismatic tradition, so he was constantly being reined in. After stepping down in 1983, he was very quiet, very much “under wraps” until the 1990s, performing some work for the Vatican’s Office of Migrant Affairs. Then in the mid-1990s, Milingo participated in a mass marriage of the Unification Church in Korea, the “Mooney” Church of Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Once again, he was reined in by the Roman Church. He was brought back to Rome and asked to repent. Until his very controversial marriage in 2001, he maintained his faculties and was very active as a titular bishop. After that, he began speaking about the sin of celibacy and how celibacy had led to the rape of nuns and children, extreme pedophilia in the Church, and rampant sexual affairs among clergy. Archbishop Milingo was not excommunicated or laicized by September 24, 2006, when, as an active Roman Catholic bishop, he illicitly but validly consecrated four men to the episcopacy at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. This changed Milingo’s life and the lives of the men he consecrated: Peter Paul Brennan, George Stallings of Washington, D.C., Patrick Trujillo of New Jersey, and Peter Joseph Gouthro of Las Vegas. All four were bishops in apostolic succession within the Independent Catholic movement. Why was this event significant?

- L. Walker: Stallings had been a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., but was already dismissed by the archdiocese, I think.
- Robison: And he had already started the Imani Temple. He was a very colorful character, and there were a lot of accusations leveled at him, but I don’t recall any allegations that had “legs.”
- Lopez: While still an active archbishop in the Roman Catholic Church, Milingo got married and ordained these men! He was not returned to the lay state or excommunicated, so it was remarkable for an active Roman Catholic bishop to subconditionally consecrate four men to the episcopacy.
- Quintana: Archbishop Milingo was on point in promoting African expressions of the Catholic tradition and moving away from colonizing, Eurocentric expressions of the Catholic faith! He was also on point in signaling the deleterious effect of celibacy on sexuality.

Lopez: It's interesting to note that, five years after Milingo was removed as archbishop of Lusaka in 1983, the Congolese rite was approved by the Roman Church, which allowed for many traditional African dances and ceremonials to be introduced into the liturgy. The Congolese rite made room for outdoor liturgies with drumming and dance, which were so culturally important to the African people. It was the Vatican's acknowledgement that they couldn't expect all people to worship in the boring ways that White people do!

As a seminarian in the 1980s and 1990s, I had a very interesting experience at the Church of St. John the Baptist in Brooklyn, where the Black, indigenous Garifuna prayed through drumming and dancing during the offering. It was a really beautiful expression of the faith! Growing up, I didn't know there was such a thing as Black Catholic!

On September 24, 2006, Milingo consecrated these four men who already claimed apostolic succession and were part of the Independent Catholic movement.

Bishop George Stallings was a former Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Washington D.C., who created the Imani temple as a Black, African-American expression of Independent Catholicism. The Imani Temple was one of the largest-known Independent parishes in the U.S. Unfortunately, it suffered from a great amount of scandal after the Roman Church very aggressively went after Bishop Stallings, accusing him of financial misrepresentation and sexual scandals as a Roman priest. In his defense, he said that he was being targeted for leaving the Roman Church.

Bishop Peter Paul Brennan was in many ways a mentor to me, and I had the honor of giving Bishop Brennan the last rites a few days before he passed away. Bishop Brennan was another pioneer in the movement and a true ecumenically-minded man. He started the Ecumenical Catholic Diocese in the Americas and was very involved with Milingo's personal prelature of "Married Priests Now!" Many former Roman priests returned to ministry as married clergy with "Married Priests Now!" Bishop Brennan was also very involved in the African Orthodox Church here in the U.S., which was founded by Father George McGuire, who eventually became a bishop. Bishop Brennan actually saved the cathedral in

Harlem that was gifted to Marcus Garvey in the 1920s or 1930s, after it was illicitly sold by a priest for some for \$100,000 in cash. I was named an archpriest by Bishop Brennan, and I was very fortunate to serve at Bishop Brennan's cathedral. The congregation is almost nonexistent, the building is in major disrepair, and we've been working for a couple of years to convince the vestry to allow us to repair it.

Bishop Patrick Trujillo served as bishop of the Old Catholic Church in America and led a rather strong Latino ministry in New Jersey.

Bishop Joseph Goudreau of Las Vegas served as presiding bishop of the Catholic Apostolic Church International. Many of us know Father Joseph Dang, who was with Bishop Gouthro for a long time.

Two days after their consecration, on September 24, 2006, the Holy See's press office announced that Archbishop Milingo and the four men involved in the consecration had automatically incurred excommunication in accordance with Canon 1382 of the *Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law*. Excommunication was not imposed, but automatically incurred through a public act against the Holy Father. The Roman Church never excommunicated them on paper. None of the four consecrated bishops were Roman Catholic, so how could they be excommunicated by the Roman Church?

Quintana: Perhaps because they were Roman Catholics before their consecration?

Lopez: At the time of their consecration, they all belonged to the Independent movement and engaged in Independent ministries. At that time, none of them were active Roman Catholics.

Quintana: That's a mystery to me: If they were not Roman Catholics, they were not subject to Roman Catholic canon law.

D'Arrigo: That's not entirely true. If you are baptized in the Roman Church, you are technically "Roman Catholic" for the rest of eternity! You may become a "fallen Catholic" or you may even be excommunicated, but you are still technically a Catholic. I suspect various ones of the four had received

other Roman Catholic sacraments, like Confirmation, or even Holy Orders, in the case of Stallings. They are still considered part of the body Catholic in the grand scheme of things, even if they were no longer active ministers in the Roman Church.

L. Walker: The statement of excommunication is a matter of fact, not a decree from Rome, so some of them would have excommunicated themselves by starting another church.

Lopez: I posed the question to see if anyone would draw any conclusions concerning the validity of Milingo's consecration. Milingo's consecration of those four bishops was a valid consecration of them as *Roman Catholic* bishops! Though removed from ministry, Archbishop Milingo was a Roman Catholic Archbishop, and he had not been excommunicated or removed from ministry.

Robison: At the time, I was a geeky teenager, who really enjoyed church stuff, and I remember the archbishop of Washington, D.C. saying that it was illicit and invalid, horrible and awful. Others said it was valid, but not licit. Others questioned whether the consecration was even valid, since they used Imani's creed, which speaks of the "communion of the saints and ancestors." American Roman Catholic bishops were running around as if their hair was on fire, and the Archdiocese was in a mess. You don't have to be a cleric to be excommunicated.

Ellis: Plenty of philosophers have been excommunicated!

D'Arrigo: If you argue that only celibate men can be bishops, you might also argue against the validity of the sacrament on grounds of insufficient matter. Recall the recent case of the priest in Arizona whose baptisms were declared invalid for lack of form! We shouldn't be concerned with whether Rome recognized the consecrations as valid; they're not likely going to see them as valid!

Lopez: This consecration certainly raised questions of the validity of Catholic sacraments. I had a priest friend in the Independent movement who was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Peter Paul Brennan. He wanted to marry in the Roman Church, but they told him that he couldn't be married in the Roman Church because he was a validly-

ordained Catholic priest, ordained by a bishop consecrated by Milingo!

- Ellis: The recognition of sacraments is based on canonical terms, like validity and liceity. As we know, bishops not in good standing with Rome can still validly ordain others, even if they will not be recognized by the Roman Church as licit.
- Lopez: We're constantly looking for sources of approval, to say that we are "real" or "valid." I've always been very vocal about the fact that our validity comes from the people we serve. Even Trish asked the other day why we are so concerned with apostolic succession!
- Robison: I checked with a friend, who says that the objections raised to this consecration related to changes to the creed and to the prayer of consecration. They invoked "the ancestors" during the laying on of hands and "altered the rite" at a fundamental level, according to Rome.
- Lopez: The Roman Church has fought over this particular case of Milingo—and they wouldn't do so if they didn't believe that this consecration was invalid! Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI tried to reconcile Milingo with Rome after his marriage, but he chose to return to his wife and not reconcile with Rome. In 2009, Milingo was laicized—reduced to the lay state—by the Holy See. He was a vocal critic of celibacy until his death on February 7, 2021. He will be remembered within our movement for his courage in consecrating Independent Catholic bishops and furthering the life and mission of the Church!

## A Conversation with Our Elders

Most Rev. Alan Kemp  
Most Rev. Lewis Keizer  
Most Rev. Paul Clemens  
Rev. Frank Quintana  
Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias, Moderator

Mathias: Today we have the pleasure of hearing from voices who have been in our movement for more than 25 years— which is a very long time in a movement that is constantly in flux! Let's invite them to introduce themselves.

Quintana: I am Father Frank Quintana of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. Unlike those who've never heard of Independent Catholics or the Old Catholic movement, I learned of it in an eighth-grade catechism class, where the priest told us in that, in extreme cases, when no Roman priest is available, we could call upon an Orthodox priest or Old Catholic priest for our last rites. I never thought about that again until I was in the seminary. Coming to the realization that celibacy was not one of my charisms, I left in the middle of my third year of seminary studies. At that time, I went looking for an Old Catholic bishop, and I found Archbishop Robert Schuyler Zeiger in the Denver area. He was fairly popular in the Old Catholic movement at the time, though he did not call himself Old Catholic. He styled himself as the archbishop metropolitan of the American Orthodox Catholic Church of America. Within a year of my association with him, he ordained me a priest, and he offered to consecrate me a bishop before he went back to the Roman Church. I was offered consecration two other times during my time within the Independent Catholic movement, and I refused it all three times because I just saw a bunch of silliness in the Independent movement, which called itself Old Catholicism at that time.

Kemp: My name is Archbishop Alan Kemp. I'm the chief executive and overseer of the Ascension Alliance, an Independent Catholic jurisdiction that came about as a result of a split with the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch. I minister to people in recovery at the Olalla Recovery Center, and I do a



livestream once a week. I currently serve as the rector of Ascension Theological College and am a retired professor of sociology at Pierce College in Lakewood, Washington. I'm a Vietnam combat veteran; I served as a Black Beret and swift boat patrol advisor in Vietnam. I came back to the United States thinking that life would be wonderful, and I plummeted. I was a Buddhist at the time, and I went searching for truth. I discovered meditation and had a great spiritual awakening, which I believed was the Holy Spirit, even though I wasn't a Christian. I engaged in a fairly intense practice of meditation, looking at parts of myself, and I did achieve a certain amount of personal and spiritual awareness. I wasn't looking for God; I was just looking for truth. God appeared to me at the end of that process, and I was totally turned off by Christianity, but Holy Spirit said, "You might want to reconsider Jesus Christ as the Son of God." That came as a shock and surprise to me. My life tail-spinned, and some 25 years later I ran across J. Gordon Melton's book, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*. I was just fascinated by the different liturgical traditions! I ran across the Independent Catholic movement through the Church of Antioch, and something "clicked" with me, so I decided to pursue it. Something tugged at me and said, "Do it!" Originally, I didn't start off with the Church of Antioch; I started off with an organization called the Order of St. Thomas, which was a brand-new religious order that claimed to be Orthodox. There's a story that goes with that. Needless to say, I did not stay with that group for very long.

Keizer: I was clandestinely ordained by Bishop Spruit in 1975, and I promised him that I would not reveal that I had been consecrated by him, because the bishops he was involved with had all promised not to consecrate new bishops without the consent of the others. Spruit was a great historian and collector of information and lineages. His church in Cambria, California had burned down, so he came up to Pacific Grove, where he had a few Independent priests who were "lapdogs"; one of them wanted to be consecrated a bishop, but Spruit didn't have a lot of respect for them. One of them contacted me because I was the dean of a small, six-year college, and they wanted to establish the Sophia Divinity School through us with the curriculum that Spruit had

developed, so that students could receive accredited courses. I first started doing Eucharist a year later in Freedom, California, and Rosamunde Miller came up to help me with that first Eucharist. I used to have a wonderful harpist who played, and we sang and developed our own liturgy. I did that for several years, then I did a lot of writing. I opened a school for mentally-gifted children, which is still going. I've been playing cornet for years, since I was a kid, making money on the side from casual gigs. I've always been an avid boater, and I wrote a book called *My Life with Boats*. I'm in the process of trying to find another power boat, now that I'm too old for sailboats. I've sailed all the way to Mexico. Twice a month, I release lectures on the pre-Christian teachings of Yeshua, Jesus, which is my main scholarly interest. In 1993, I was subconditionally consecrated by Bishop Boyer, who came over from London, at a Unitarian church that I rented in Freedom, California. He had a dream, and we talked on the phone quite a bit.

Clemens: From ages 13 to 21, I was in the Catholic seminary at Notre Dame University with the Holy Cross Fathers, studying for the Roman priesthood from 1958 to 1965. I spent a year of novitiate in silence, then professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. After several years, I got mono, not by kissing anyone, but just simply through overwork, stress and no sleep. I went home and decided that I would explore the world. I earned my M.A. in English Literature and taught in New York City at Hunter College. After driving cross-country to California, I answered an ad and became the technical editor for the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Every Wednesday afternoon I met with an esteemed group of spiritually-oriented psychologists who were studying the nature of the mind and altered states of consciousness. Transpersonal psychologists had two main "rules": You had to have a spiritual practice, and you had to have a spiritual teacher. I was also studying and working with a Tibetan Lama in Berkeley for five years and wrote fifteen books for him. I met my wife there, and we moved up to a 10-acre farmstead in Nevada City, California with her three kids, and a fourth coming. There we met a nurse who was a student of a bishop in Chico, California who was consecrated by Herman Spruit and others. On April 15, 1978, I was

ordained a priest on Easter Sunday by Bishop Richard Svihus. Spruit came up to our property and held an outside Eucharist under a big cedar tree. We got to know each other quite well over the phone. He was interested in me because I had studied with Hindu and Sufi masters and was the student of a Tibetan Lama for five years, and had received a lot of rich Buddhist teachings there. Herman was looking for someone who could help him bridge the teachings of East and West. I had started a printing company, then eventually a publishing company, and felt that my mission as a priest was to publish books. In the end, we published some 320 books on psychology, self-help, comparative spiritual traditions, and transpersonal psychology. I still edit the *Journal* in its 54<sup>th</sup> year. My ministry is in our Chapel of St. Francis, which we established in our barn in the late 70's, with a small group of 15-20 local people. I have always believed that all seven sacraments are contained within the Eucharistic service, and that the Eucharist, as communion, is an invitation to meditation, to go into deeper aspects of ourselves, so from time to time we've also held a mid-week group meditation. We live in a very rural community, where I've done mostly weddings, baptisms and funerals. Over the past 45 years, we have hosted a number of Tibetan lamas, healers and authors from Blue Dolphin Publishing for potlucks, seminars and retreats on our property. We find that only a select few people are interested in the more spiritual or esoteric or mystical side of life. As Bishop Keizer said 50 years ago in his book, *The Wandering Bishops*, there are many priests and individuals who are mainly interested in developing their inner spiritual life and who do not seek to have churches or congregations. When I was ordained by Herman, we understood that my work in the world was going to be through literature and publishing, rather than focus on a church as such. Herman told me, "I'm ordaining you to keep the sacraments alive and to be an exemplary person in society. Become one with the mind of Christ, and live the teachings!" As far as the larger independent movement, especially for those of you in parishes with congregations, I find that young people today aren't much interested in ritual or liturgy until they experience the power contained within the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, for themselves. However, once we get them

talking and exploring, they realize the basic truth that “the kingdom of heaven is within!” They start reaching into themselves and finding a richness there. Rather than simply lead people in prayer, we lead them into themselves—where they spend 99% of their time anyway. We’ve found that people genuinely appreciate meditating together in a safe space in silence.

**Mathias:** For the sake of time, we’ll combine three questions: What was the movement like when you first came to it? In what ways has it changed for the better? And in what ways do you wish it were still like the movement of yesteryear?

**Keizer:** Rosamunde Miller and I pulled together a meeting of all Independent clergy that we had contacted throughout the country, and they came to Santa Cruz where we met in a Methodist church. We were so unimpressed with the quality of the intellect of all these people that we vowed we would never join any other kind of group again! For that reason, it’s a big step for me to connect with you now. I don’t wish for the movement to return to yesteryear in any way. I pointed out to Alan that the first woman bishop may have been Annie Besant. She was a great social reformer, and I have a photo of her in my sanctuary, with a caption that says that she was probably the first woman bishop. The movement is way, way, way, way better than it was before.

**Kemp:** Some people may not know who Annie Besant was. She was a very influential person in the U.S. Theosophical Society, which was very closely aligned with the Liberal Catholic Church, which began in the United Kingdom. There was quite a controversy that involved Herman Adrian Spruit concerning the ownership of the pro-cathedral in Los Angeles, because Spruit’s consecrator, Charles Hampton, was the regionary bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in the United States, and then he was deposed, and the Liberal Catholic Church in Great Britain attempted to take the church property. Ultimately, Charles Hampton, the regionary bishop who had been deposed, won that lawsuit after he died. Herman Spruit was very involved in that legal action, partly because Herman worked as a paralegal for a law firm at that time—which is how he met Charles Hampton, his consecrator.

Quintana: I don't yearn for anything about the way it was back then. The movement has greatly improved and is filled with people who are serious church men and women, people who are willing and wanting to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in its Catholic form. I'm thrilled with the way things are beginning to move now. Back when I first came into the movement, after I was ordained by Archbishop Robert Schuyler Zeiger, I found that the movement was mostly filled with people who were wanting titles and self-aggrandizement. They wanted costumes with lace to the tits. It was a movement of people who wanted to add to their meager egos – and that disturbed me very much. I ended up moving over to the Episcopal Church, which considered the orders of all *episcopi vagantes* as invalid. They were investigating the possibility of receiving me as a priest, until the parish that I was part of, St. Mary's, left the Episcopal Church amid the great turmoil of 1976. We became the first parish of the Anglican Catholic Church. That was my first encounter with serious church people in Independent Catholicism, and that's what's happening now in the Independent movement: We have serious church people wanting to do the work. They are "Matthew 25" Catholics. Because of the whole difficulty of intercommunion and all the overlapping jurisdictions, I'm hopeful that we might put a moratorium on the consecration of new bishops.

Mathias: For the "younger" folks in our movement, who are some of the jurisdictions and/or local communities and/or people from within our movement that "younger" folks should know about? Are there certain stories that you can share about the people and/or communities and/or jurisdictions of yesteryear that might otherwise be lost to history if folks like you don't tell stories on them?

Kemp: I would like to say a word about my first contact with the Order of St. Thomas back in 1994. I was living in Tacoma, Washington, and I was a fairly-established professional: a licensed psychotherapist, a licensed clinical social worker, and a marriage and family therapist. I was also teaching at Pierce College, a local community college. I discovered the movement through Melton's *Encyclopedia*, and I became active in the Federation of Independent Catholic and Orthodox Bishops (FICOB), which was established by

Herman Spruit of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch. I ran across the Order of St. Thomas, and soon discovered that people in the Independent movement were willing to ordain you and consecrate you—even if you hadn't been formed, if you had other professional credentials. The Order of St. Thomas was willing to ordain me as a deacon on day one, without any preparation whatsoever, and so my ego went for it. That was a mistake on my part. I showed up as a fairly well-educated person at the airport in Colorado Springs, Colorado, not knowing what to expect from the Order of St. Thomas. Three bishops were waiting there to welcome me: One of them was dressed in a black Eastern Orthodox outfit, with hat and veil, and a large icon around his neck. One bishop was in full Western attire: a choir cassock with red piping and a purple cincture and biretta, the “whole nine yards.” The third bishop looked kind of normal: He wore a clergy shirt with a sport coat. I thought I had arrived at a fashion show of the Independent Sacramental Movement! They ordained me to all of the minor orders on day one, then as a deacon on day two. The archbishop metropolitan had been kicked out of the Church of Antioch: He didn't fit in as a priest, let alone as an “archbishop”! It was absolutely nuts. I could not stay with them longer than a few days. I then found a more sane CACINA bishop in Tacoma, Washington, who was extremely pastoral with me. I then connected with Meri Spruit in Creswell, Oregon, and the Church of Antioch received me as a deacon, even though I didn't have any formation. I then began the formation program of Sophia Divinity School, which supplemented my knowledge. I would never want to go back to such a thing: It was awful. It was crazy. It was nuts! The Independent movement was a train wreck. And now we can look at Holy Family and at St. Stanislaus, where some pretty progressive, well-educated, well-formed people are doing serious ministry in a variety of different ways! I am so pleased to see that the Independent movement has “grown up” to a large extent. Don't get me wrong: We're not 100%, and there's still a lot of craziness out there—but we've come a long way!

Quintana: While recognizing that we want to chronicle what happened back then, there's not a whole lot from yesteryear that I would want to preserve in the archives of the Independent movement! I would probably want to preserve the memory of Archbishop Robert Schuyler Zeiger, who then consecrated Archbishop Reiner Laufers, who was part of the Apostolic Orthodox Catholic Church of Archbishop Zeiger. Laufers was a pretty good guy, but he was surrounded by a lot of craziness. I would want to chronicle their ministries. I would also want to recognize and chronicle the history of Bishop Peter Elder Hickman, the founder of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. He didn't participate in the craziness, but he was part of the movement during that time. He was always a very serious, pious, mystical bishop – and he's still alive. In the old days, you might be the public school janitor by day, and the Prince Archbishop of Pimlico by night!

Kemp: I'm glad we're done with those days! Let's research the histories of some of the more serious clergy today!

Keizer: I remember Bishop Rosamonde Miller, whose ministry is now kept up by her husband, David. A lot of young people were attracted to her ministry. Lance Beizer was one of the bishops who used to work with Rose. I admired him very much back in the day. Back in the 1970s, he used to keep all the records and teaching materials for the Liberal Catholic Church in Ojai, California, before moving back east. They were putting him through so many hoops, so I consecrated him a bishop.

Clemens: I'm not sure how much you all know about Herman Spruit. Lewis Keizer, too, went through quite a journey, which is memorialized in his book, *The Wandering Bishops*. He realized that so much of Christianity is actually "Churchianity," depriving us of the free Spirit of Christ within us. I was still a deacon when Herman came out to our property and said, "Let's turn your barn into a chapel!" We first set up an altar under a large cedar tree, and about 20 people in our community joined us. My wife's grandfather always said, "My cathedral is out here in the forest. This is where I worship God, out here among the trees, the flowers and the birds!" Herman Spruit was the same way. He liked to break rules that inhibited people. He empowered his "barefoot"

priests to share the sacraments anywhere and everywhere! I'll always remember his raspy voice, talking to me on the phone about his experience of divine love for hours and hours!

Quintana: Bishop James Orin Mote, the co-founder of the Anglican Catholic Church, was another important figure in the history of our movement. I was his assistant for some 20 years. Bishop Francisco Pagtakhan of the Philippine Independent Church was involved in his consecration. That was a very conservative church, and he was not in favor of women's ordination, so I was always trying to move him towards that. Once he retired, his successor at the parish relieved me, and that's another story!

Mathias: A final question for our panelists: Now that you have the attention of "young 'uns" in the movement – those with less knowledge and experience of the movement than y'all – what final words might you share with the "young 'uns" in our movement?

Quintana: Use those of us who are seniors as a resource. Any of us would be happy to provide guidance and direction to the movement. Let's not be involved in self-aggrandizement in this movement, but let's seek to have a spirit of servanthood. Let's be "Matthew 25" Catholics, or, as Pope Francis said, shepherds who smell like the sheep!

Kemp: Ministry is where it's at. Wherever you happen to be, know that your ministry is so extremely important. I found that in my ministry to recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. A deceased friend of mine, Father Matthew, was a Benedictine canon lawyer – and he did not have a lot of respect for the Independent movement – but he did say that our great "saving grace" is that we provide ministry where Roman Catholic clergy and other mainstream groups don't go. We go places where others are not willing to go, and we do real ministry in a variety of different ways. Let's be creative. Contrary to what others have said, I believe that young people are craving for the liturgy. Young people are really looking for good liturgy and a good, solid grounding in a religious tradition, which is why Father Mike, Father Jayme and Father Marek are doing so well!



Clemens: I think younger people are experiencing the difference between traditional religion—which “binds” us with traditional belief systems and credos—and spirituality, which opens their hearts to a variety of respected, older traditions. They’re turned off when they don’t understand the power in the sacraments. All the sacraments are contained in the Eucharist, and the ultimate message of spirituality is “communion,” joining with the mind of Christ and being one with yourself and with all of creation. I find that young people are very receptive to spirituality, but not to religion as such. They have too many negative memories of arguing with their parents and being forced to get dressed and go to church on Sundays. That’s not the spirituality we search for all our lives! I myself jumped from Roman Catholicism to traditional Tibetan Buddhism, and we’ve invited Lamas to our property for over 40 years. I have published books on the Sufi tradition as well, and I know Sufi teachers who transmit energy, heart-to-heart, and can put you in states of bliss on a dime. Our mind is our most precious gift, which is why I always encourage young people to search inside themselves and to ask a lot of questions. I hope that my epitaph is, “He asked too many questions”! There are many paths to the top of the mountain, but when we get there, the view is always the same: love! That’s really the goal of all spirituality and spiritual traditions. I like to say that religion is the banister that helps guide us up the stairs—and, as we age, we often realize the value of that “banister.” Others just fly up the “steps” without the banister! I encourage silent meditation, even if that’s only five or ten minutes a day, without words or thoughts. Focus on spirituality over religion, go into yourself, and discover the love in your heart so you can radiate it to others!

Mathias: Thank you all for sharing of your wisdom and experience with us!

## Five Years Later: Critical Response to *The Other Catholics*

### A Keynote by Dr. Julie Byrne

It's great to see all the amazing faces here! You are all so beautiful, and if I start calling out the names of people I recognize, I will never stop! This Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School is an amazing enterprise, and I'm so honored to be here.

I have to give a shout out, of course, to all my peeps in the Church of Antioch and Ascension Alliance, who were, of course, intimately part of the making of *The Other Catholics*. They were my teachers and friends during the ten years that led up to the publication of that work. I also want to thank anyone here who participated in my anonymous survey, those of you who received an email from a stranger asking that you answer all sorts of questions about Independent Catholicism. Thank you for responding to that survey. After the book came out, I went on a book tour and met many more of you, who were such amazing hosts and who also became friends. And I also have so many friends among you on social media. I would love to connect with any of you to whom I'm not already connected!

There's really not a day that goes by that I don't talk with at least one of you—not just about Independent Catholicism, but about so many things we have in common. I love that these friendships have blossomed and flowered all these years, and I'm so proud to be part of this community and in ongoing connection with you all!

Today I'll discuss the critical reception of *The Other Catholics* since its publication in 2016. The first thing I want to say is that I really only ever wanted for word to get out about this movement: That was really the point of writing the book. It was such a discovery for me to know that Independent Catholicism existed, and I knew that so many other people would appreciate knowing about it as well. I just wanted to really lift up the long history of your work and to convey to people in as even-handed a way as I could that they might like something here, and that they might learn something here that they might appreciate knowing. I wanted the transformative and often life-changing work that you all do to get out to more people! Getting the word out was really the point for me.

I also want to say that *The Other Catholics* is not about me. It's about you. It is about what you have been doing all this time. Today I'll share a review of critical responses to the book that I wrote—but that book is all about *you*, and it couldn't have happened without your input. You were one of the conditions for the possibility of the book being written!

Today we'll look at the critical reviews of scholars, journalists and other intellectuals—critical responses from people who were very new to the idea of this movement. For many people, it's a great surprise that this movement exists at all! *The Other Catholics* has informed them of you, and what we'll see in these reviews are the attempts of critics to formulate a response on deadline to these very new thoughts for them.

You are the best critics of this movement. You are daily invested in thinking about it. You are daily discovering new things about it. You think about it from all angles, and you invest in its improvement. The following responses are the “first take” or “hot take” of outsiders—and it's nonetheless interesting to know what outsiders think!

First, I'll share a background to the critical response, then the book reviews, then the citations of *The Other Catholics* in scholarship, and then what's perhaps most exciting: the new scholarship and the new books on Independent Catholicism that are being published and that are taking the conversation further.

Let's start with the background for critical responses. I first became aware of Independent Catholicism in 1988, when I was a junior at Duke University. I self-identified as Roman Catholic at that time, and I attended a mass in Duke Chapel with a visiting priest, Father George Stallings. That was an experience I'll never forget! Father Stallings helped us understand new idioms of African-American culture and heritage. A year later, he left the Roman Catholic Church and founded Imani Temple in Washington, D.C., and that was the moment at which I became aware of Independent Catholicism. When I started to visit Imani Temple, I thought that my work would focus on that congregation. I saw all sorts of priests around the altar at Imani Temple, and I asked them, “Who are you?” They told me the churches they were from, and I realized there were many more Independent Catholic churches than just the Imani Temple.

In 2001, *Spiritus Christi* in Rochester, New York made national headlines when Bishop Peter Elder Hickman ordained Mary Ramerman to the priesthood. That event definitely caught my attention, and *Spiritus Christi* continues to thrive today, thanks to the vision of its founders, Mary Ramerman and James Callan, and the leadership of its pastor, Myra Brown. Those events made Independent Catholicism more visible, opening the possibility for scholarship on the movement.

Another condition for the possibility of this book was my position as Chair of Catholic Studies at Hofstra University. Such Catholic Studies positions at non-Catholic universities have made it possible for Catholic Studies to branch beyond Roman Catholicism without being censured,

as might happen at universities that have some relationship to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Such censure is real. My Chair is named for Father Tom Hartman, a very expansive-thinking Catholic, perhaps best known for his long-running syndicated column, “God Squad,” with Rabbi Marc Gellman, where the two responded to spiritual questions. He was very ecumenical and very open-minded.

It’s also notable that Columbia University Press, a reputed academic press known for critical studies of religion, was interested in the manuscript. That, too, was a condition for the possibility of *The Other Catholics*.

Let’s shift our attention now to the reviews of *The Other Catholics*. You can find and download these for free at my page on academia.edu. *The Other Catholics* was reviewed in the most important U.S. non-academic publications that treat Catholicism, including *National Catholic Reporter* and *America* magazine, the publication of the Jesuits in the United States. This means that you were noticed, and that the editors of these publications felt it incumbent to publish a review. Both of these publications have vast readerships among U.S. Roman Catholics and other people who are religious and non-religious. Those publications definitely got the word out about you!

Reviews were published in non-academic publication, like *Publishers Weekly*, *America*, *Christian Century*, *Catholic Library World*, *Gumbo* (the newsletter of The Grail, a venerable and amazing community of Catholic lay women in the United States), *EqualWrites* (a sister publication about women’s ordination in the Roman tradition), *Times Higher Education* of London, *National Catholic Reporter*, and *Conscience*, which is published by Catholics for Choice, which is amazing and is in the news a lot these days.

*The Other Catholics* was also reviewed in the most important academic journals treating Catholicism and other Christian religions. My field of study is American Religious History, with a specialization in Catholic Studies, so all the important journals in the larger field of American Religious History, and Catholic Studies in particular, reviewed *The Other Catholics*. It was also featured in a review symposium in *American Catholic Studies*, which was a really big deal, helping Independent Catholicism to make its mark on Catholic Studies. Until very recently, that journal would never have touched a book on Independent Catholicism with a ten-foot pole—and now it has become really hip to branch out and expand the meaning of Catholic Studies! That journal’s review of *The Other Catholics* helped to expand the “umbrella” of Catholic Studies even more!

*The Other Catholics* was reviewed by such academic journals as *Religion Watch* (of Baptist-affiliated Baylor University, which is a hub for the study of the sociology of religion), *Church History* (the preeminent journal for the global history of Christianity), *American Catholic Studies Newsletter* (a widely-read Catholic Studies publication of the Cushwa Center at Notre Dame), the *Journal of Religion*, the *Journal of Religious History*, *Reviews in Religion and Theology* (a U.K.-based publication), *Reading Religion* (the review outlet for the American Academy of Religion, the largest professional organization of scholars of religion in the United States), and the *Journal of American Culture*. It was also included in the review symposium on American Catholic Studies.

Book reviews often provide summaries of the works they review. They don't do their job unless they start out by just telling readers what is in the book! Reviews of *The Other Catholics* tend to recount that the book tells a centuries-long story—a much longer story than most people realize—that largely focuses on the Church of Antioch. They descriptively repeat my argument that Independent Catholicism is central, not marginal, to Catholicism as a whole. They repeat my contention in my book that Catholicism shouldn't be defined by belonging to a particular communion, but by the four S's: succession sacraments, saints and self-description as Catholic. They picked up on sacramental justice, which is a theme in the book and which contrasts with social justice: Independent Catholics are very oriented toward social justice, but the scope of their ministry often focuses on sacramental justice, the opening of the sacraments to people in ways that big bodies don't or can't do as quickly. They focus, often with great surprise, on the fact that Independent Catholicism is portrayed in the book not as oppositional to Roman Catholicism, but as collaborative with it, even if kind of on the "down low": Many relationships, both public and private, between Independent Catholic and Roman Catholic leaders, lead them to collaborate on doing this thing called "Catholicism." The book talks about other interreligious, ecumenical, interfaith relationships, but reviewers tend to focus on the relationship with Roman Catholicism. Many also commented on my place in the book, as someone who participated in as well as observed the Church of Antioch all those years. They note how I attended services, met people, hung out in Archbishop Richard Gundry's kitchen—and how I was affected by those experiences: My mind changed, I had somatic responses, I was moved. I put those feelings and experiences in the book, and various reviewers lifted up that part.

This was many reviewers' first exposure to Independent Catholicism. Many didn't know that it existed, or hadn't really thought about it before. They shared their surprise. That's a good thing: It tells us that word is getting out! Independent Catholicism is a surprise, even to people who study Catholicism for a living, which tells us that we still have a lot of work to do to get the word out. All reviewers were very open and appreciative of what they learned about the existence of Independent Catholicism and what Independent Catholics do—and yes, there was some resistance and a bit of snarkiness here and there. The reviewer for the *National Catholic Reporter* seemed taken off guard, for instance, but he, too, was ultimately open, appreciative, even amazed.

That's a summary of the generous readings that you received from reviewers from a wide variety of backgrounds. They said that *The Other Catholics* provides a different picture of Catholicism as a whole, one that suggests a different framework for studying Catholicism as a whole. We can no longer pretend that Catholicism is just Roman Catholicism! We're getting the word out. They often noted the trade-off: of how you pay for having small, mobile, flexible groups in terms of discontinuity, instability and the institutional fraying that more easily happens as small groups come and go. This is a longstanding conversation in Independent Catholicism, and even the Church of Antioch experienced a split as the narrative of the book unfolded.

Many of the reviewers assessed the evidence for the overall importance of Independent Catholicism. For a lot of people, the jury on that is still out. I argue that it is and always has been central to understanding Catholicism as a whole. Some were totally convinced, while others wanted to hold out, suggesting that Independent Catholicism is just too tiny to be massively important. Reviewers went in different directions on that, but they were assessing the evidence for the importance of the movement in the overall picture of Catholicism.

The reviews are worth reading, since people were very generous, very smart, and made really interesting points. I'll share with you some of the more fascinating "pull quotes" of the "hot takes" of outsiders.

Katherine Moran, a scholar at St. Louis University, wrote in the *Journal of Religious History*, "When presented with the term 'Catholicism,' Byrne would like us to automatically ask, 'what kind?' This relatively simple point opens up a world of new analytical possibilities." Honestly, that was a great line to read! If nothing else, I really do just want people to have to ask, "What kind of Catholicism are you talking about?" Whatever you think of Independent Catholicism, you must acknowledge that there is more than one kind of Catholicism.

Tricia Bruce, a sociologist of Catholicism at Marywood University, wrote that the

invisibility [of independent Catholics in scholars' accounts thus far] may especially indict studies in sociology, a discipline steeped in analyses of power: Who constitutes "us" (or "them")? Who controls the story? While increasing racial diversity among American Catholics is slowly decentering dominant European narratives of the U.S. Church, Byrne's work suggests that the dynamics of exclusion extend even farther: to the boundaries of religious identity. We've unfairly limited the story

Again, we see a Roman Catholic scholar, who is a sociologist of religion at a Roman Catholic university, saying that we have unfairly limited the story. Honoring her own discipline, she notes that sociology doesn't allow us to limit the story. We have to take into account the dynamics of power that are involved with naming, particularly when we wrongly associate "Catholicism" with Roman Catholicism.

Miles Pattenden of Oxford University wrote in the U.K. *Journal of Reviews in Religion and Theology* that the

core questions are 'what does it mean to be Catholic?' and 'who decides what Catholicism is?' ...It fascinates that a man like [Archbishop Richard] Gundry has continued to assert his Catholicism in the face of hostility from the Roman hierarchy; it intrigues almost as much that so many lay Roman Catholics ask him to preside over weddings that Roman Catholic priests will not or cannot perform, caring little that the Roman Catholic hierarchy does not recognize him.

Here, again, we see someone who is pondering anew the definition of "Catholicism" and who is digesting this story and the ironies of the daily life of Archbishop Richard Gundry, who lived with a level of tension with Roman Catholic leadership.

Catherine Osborne of the Cushwa Center's newsletter, *American Catholic Studies*, engaged in an in-depth reading of your story.

Instead of a stable boundary drawn between Roman and independent Catholicism, Byrne sees froth and ferment, an insight which allows her not only to observe change within "big-body" Catholicism, but to propose a mechanism for how

change happens. Maybe because I read much of her book while in California, I found it easy to picture waves cresting and pounding against the shore, constantly reconfiguring the shifting sands between land and water.

That's a really poetic image among many that Catherine Osborn used in her review, reflecting back to you the story that is being told of you in *The Other Catholics* and a very thoughtful reviewer's take on the book.

I'll now share some especially interesting criticisms. Remember: You are the best critics of this movement. I choose these particular criticisms, not because I agree with them, but because they were really searching criticisms – ones I'm sure you've asked yourself.

Dr. J. Patrick Hornbeck, II, the chair of the theology department at Fordham University, a Roman Catholic university here in New York, wrote in *American Catholic Studies*:

*The Other Catholics* does not fulfill the promise of its title. As Byrne herself acknowledges, the book offers an extraordinarily detailed study of the Church of Antioch in lieu of exploring independent Catholicism more fully as a phenomenon....It is not clear whether Antioch is representative...or an outlier. Absent details that would permit us to make effective comparisons, it is impossible to determine whether Antioch is a reliable bellwether...and therefore to establish whether this volume is an excellent religious ethnography, or something more.

That criticism is totally fair. I made decisions about how to do the book, and it's eminently clear that I was not studying all of Independent Catholicism. Some people who are new to Independent Catholicism might have been better served by more of an overview, rather than a deep dive into the Church of Antioch in particular.

Kathleen Kautzer, a really amazing scholar of Catholicism, also in the field of sociology, wrote *The Underground Church*, which is largely about progressive Roman Catholics in different states of relationship to the institutional church since Vatican II. She mentions Independent Catholicism in her work, so she was one reviewer who was actually familiar with Independent Catholicism in advance. She wrote:

The author describes Antiochians as more involved in sacramental than social justice, because their primary mission is administering the sacraments to those denied access in other denominations. Nonetheless, their refusal to develop a



uniform theology or impose requirements on members inevitably deems questions of justice and morality as individual rather than communal choices.

This speaks to the really thick commitment of some progressive Roman Catholics, which is not popular in America. The trend in Catholicism, including Roman Catholicism, is toward independence and includes such issues as individuals determining their own beliefs. She really focused on her desire for a Catholicism that develops a uniform theology without imposing requirements, since collective works mean that nobody gets everything they want, but all are engaged in the work together. This sentiment was interestingly reflected in the review in *America* magazine as well: Nathan Schneider is a convert to Roman Catholicism and a super-interesting thinker. He titled his review “The Compromise that Binds,” and his point is that nobody in Roman Catholicism gets what they want, but they are committed to being in there together. They don’t get what they want, they compromise, and they decide that it’s better to stay together. You see in these two reviews a very progressive Catholic desire to counter the individualism of American society.

Miles Pattenden of Oxford University had a really sharp take on American religion in general, including Independent Catholicism. He wrote:

Is [independent Catholicism]...made possible by the unique conditions of twentieth-century America? It exists because of America’s insatiable demand for new forms of religion that perfectly satisfy their consumer wants and because the American government polices religious toleration rigorously and grants churches tax-exempt status.

Again, in the context of a very thoughtful review, we find a pretty sharp take on the individualism of formulations of niche religion, which, according to him, might include Independent Catholicism, or at least the Church of Antioch, as it was described in the book. He clearly shares a criticism of America’s way of doing religion, which goes beyond the Church of Antioch or Independent Catholicism.

I have my own criticisms of myself and my book—things that I would do differently. I discovered a 2009 article from the Dutch/English *Low Countries Historical Review*, which generally reviews the history of the Netherlands, and which spoke of a 2000 Dutch book called *The Other Catholics*. This tells us that Dutch scholars were already talking about “the Other Catholics” in the context of Dutch Catholicism, which is, of

course, an important historical lineage of Independent Catholicism. I don't read Dutch, and I hadn't looked at European scholarship on Independent Catholicism, so I had no idea that the phrase "The Other Catholics" had been used in this context before. An assessment of works of other languages could have disclosed scholarship that I could have taken into account, including crediting that other book for the title of my work.

My book also describes a generally White version of Independent Catholicism. Since writing it, it has become clear to me that different non-White ethnicities also comprise the history of Independent Catholicism. The movement is much more diverse. Even Latin American and Spanish-speaking congregations are more prevalent than I acknowledged in the book. I mention them, but do not bring enough attention to them. If I were Spanish-speaking at the time, I might have seen more of that. I now live in a largely-Dominican neighborhood, where I practice Spanish with my neighbors every day, and I've come to see that you can't study American Catholicism today—Independent or otherwise—without being conversant in Spanish.

Let's talk about the citations of *The Other Catholics* in books, articles and encyclopedia entries, since these are other ways in which word has spread of you and your movement. According to Google Scholar, the following scholars—and there are probably at least twice as many out there—have cited *The Other Catholics* in their writings:

Bruce, Tricia C. 2017, *Parish and Place: Making Room for Diversity in the American Catholic Church*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Clites, Brian J. 2022. "A Theology of Voice; VOCAL and the Catholic Clergy Abuse Survivor Movement." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 40:1 (81-105).

De Kadt, Emmanuel. 2021. "Liberal Religion." *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Politics, and Ideology*. London: Routledge. Ed. Jeffrey Haynes.

Dulle, Tim. 2018. "Making New Wineskins." *American Catholic Studies* 129:3 (109-121).

Matily-Kipp, Laurie. 2017. "The Clock and the Compass: Mormon Culture in Motion." *Journal of Mormon History* 43:2 (1-19).

Mayblin, Maya. 2019. "The Ultimate Return: Dissent, Apostolic Succession, and the Renewed Ministry of Roman Catholic Women Priests." *History and Anthropology* 30:2 (133-148).

Moran, Katherine. 2020. *The Imperial Church*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Oliphant, Elayne. 2021. *The Privilege of Being Banal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Petro, Anthony. 2017. "Ray Navarro's Jesus Campus, AIDS Activist Video, and the 'New Anti-Catholicism.'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85:4 (920-56).
- Ruble, Sarah. 2018. "Religious – A Historiographical Survey." *The Routledge History of the Twentieth-Century United States*. Eds. Jerald Podair and Darren Dochuk, London: Routledge. 359-368.
- Sullivan, Winifred Fallers. 2020. *Church State Corporation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zeller, Benjamin 2020. "The Fraternité Notre Dame: From Emergence in Fréchou to Sojourn in Chicago." *Numen* 67 (191-225).

What did their citations say? Elaine Oliphant, in her study titled *The Privilege of Being Banal: Art, Secularism & Catholicism in Paris*, writes:

Following Julie Byrne's emphasis on the existence of numerous independent Catholic groups who do not acknowledge the authority of the pope in Rome, I attempt to preface the term 'Catholic' with 'Roman' at numerous points, to acknowledge that the particular group of Catholics in this book does fall under the authority of the Vatican."

There were many citations like this. Katherine Moran shares the same, simple point: There are other kinds of Catholics, so people can no longer say "Catholic" for "Roman Catholic." This is totally anecdotal, but my sister is studying for a Master of Divinity at Yale, where one of her professors of Catholicism opened the semester by saying, "We're going to study Catholics – and I'm not talking about the ones in Julie Byrne's book." That professor acknowledged that there are "other Catholics" out there!

Perhaps the most interesting thread of citation and influence that we should be aware of is the impact of *The Other Catholics* on the history of Mormonism. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, a scholar of Mormonism – though not a Mormon herself – and the president of the Mormon History Association, which has lately exploded with participation, sophistication, and openness, shared in her presidential talk that *The Other Catholics* was a model for her thinking about the relationship between the main LDS church and the many small groups that scholars need to include in the study of Mormonism. She shared: "In short, as [Byrne] concludes, the clamor is the story itself. So, too, for Mormons? Can the clamor be the story?" I think that's super-interesting.

Another important and moving citation is by Brian Clites of Northwestern University, who is a scholar of American religion and Catholic studies and is the nation's leading scholar on the clergy abuse survivor movement. He interviews survivors and chronicles their activism and how they're pushing the needle on this issue. In an article that was just published this year in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, he narrates the origins of the Roman Catholic clergy sex abuse survivor movement, which goes back to the 1960s. Clites notes that important early founders of that movement were Independent Catholic priests:

Hayes was ordained in the Roman Catholic rite. Economus and Nelson were ordained in the Holy Independent Catholic Church. Though aware of this distinction, survivors nevertheless understood Economus and Nelson as fully Catholic. For an astute analysis of the ideological norms at stake in how we differentiate (and usually ignore) non-Roman Catholics, see Julie Byrne, *The Other Catholics*.

People of the Church of Antioch will recognize "Nelson" as Father Jay Nelson, who was part of the Church of Antioch for years. This incredibly informative work on the early sex abuse survivor movement highlights him and shows how influential Independent Catholic priests have been part of Catholicism as a whole for a long time.

In her 2020 work, *Church State Corporation*, Winifred Sullivan of the University of Chicago embraces the fact and phenomenon of Independent Catholicism. It's difficult to overstate Winifred Sullivan's impact on scholarship about religious freedom and religion in the law in the United States. In her latest book, which is very theoretical and very important, she questions whether it's possible to imagine law, church and economic life in the United States differently, as collective alternatives to patriarchal, racist, statist and capitalist models. She writes:

One answer, maybe the most important one, is that the [church/state nexus] is always also otherwise. We may just be looking in the wrong places. That is the teaching of Julie Byrne's wonderful book, *The Other Catholics*...[the church/state nexus] is not exhausted by the types imagined by the law. Running beside and within and beyond each there are other churches. Other laws...other ways of making a living. Even outlaw churches-in-law. How can those be both valued and reformed?

That was a significant call-out of you all: You present radical alternatives to how we think about American religion! It's as if, on the other side of the "coin" where critics talk about the individualism of Independent Catholicism, Sullivan is saying, "Independent Catholics are so different. We really need to think with them. We need to run with them. There's something happening there that's helping us think of alternatives, that's helping us imagine possibilities!"

Finally, and perhaps most exciting, is the new scholarship on Independent Catholicism that is coming out. Some of you are authors yourselves: You are creators of the intellectual lineage of Independent Catholicism. The works I'll mention are by scholars of religious studies, who are not part of the movement. They bring outside attention to the movement, and they bring the movement to a wider audience. In his review of my work, Peter Gardella, a scholar of Catholicism and popular culture, notes how pop culture figures have populated Independent Catholicism—like Sinéad O'Connor, who is an Independent Catholic priest; jazz musician John Coltrane, who was an Independent Catholic priest and the inspiration for the African Orthodox Church in San Francisco that bears his name; and William Francis Henry Brothers, "the Hippie Priest" who landed in Woodstock, New York and was reportedly a great influence on Bob Dylan. Somebody could pull together a dissertation or book on the Independent Catholic influence on popular culture!

The books that have been published include Jill Peterfeso's *Womanpriest*, an excellent study published by Fordham University Press about the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement. This amazing book was published under a "free forever" grant, so you can find it online for free. Alexis Tancibok wrote his dissertation at the University of Durham in England on Joseph René Vilatte. He is a scholar of religion and a third- or fourth-generation Independent Catholic, so he is really deep in the movement. His 415-page critical biography of Vilatte is available online under the title, *Early Independent Catholicism in Context: A re-examination of the career of Archbishop Joseph René Vilatte (1884-1929)*. The digitization of sources all over the world—including newspaper articles in Paris and Russia that reported on Vilatte—makes possible a reconstruction of the history of Independent Catholicism in ways that we just couldn't have done before. They show that Vilatte wasn't an outlier, simply working in congregations in Upper Michigan; he was part of a European movement that was rethinking Catholicism from the ground up!

Other scholars, from very different directions, include Tshepo Masango Chéry, a scholar of South Africa, who is writing on the really

important Independent Catholic connections between the African Orthodox Church and the South African people, like Archbishop Alexander, who established Independent Catholicism in South Africa.

Matthew Butler is an eminent scholar on Catholicism at the time of the Mexican revolution. Next year, the University of New Mexico Press will publish his work, *Mexico's Spiritual Reconquest: Indigenous Catholics and Father Pérez's Revolutionary Church*. Father Pérez came to the U.S. and had some very interesting connections here. Both will be amazing books to read.

Perhaps most interesting is an edited volume I'm a part of, that is about to be proposed to Brill by Elizabeth Pritchard, a professor of American religion at Bowdoin College, and Peter-Ben Smit, a scholar of Old Catholicism whom many of you know. The news broke only a few weeks ago. They're proposing a volume on modern Catholics who don't self-identify as Roman, and it contains a really interesting table of contents, with more scholars around the world who are looking at Independent Catholicism. I share here a glimpse of the proposed table of contents:

Pritchard, Elizabeth, and Peter-Ben Smit, eds.

*Catholic but Not Roman:*

*Modern & Independent Catholics Around the World.*

Proposal to Brill in progress.

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This will continue to put Independent Catholicism "on the map" and extend what we know in scholarly ways. The word is out, and a lot of people will realize that they can't say "Catholicism" without comprehending that it's a more expansive term than they previously thought!

It's not just *The Other Catholics*. It's not just the reviews or citations. The work that all of you are engaged in is becoming more visible. Independent Catholicism is transformative. It's making an impact on people's lives.

There's a lot of discussion in Independent Catholicism today as to whether to adopt a more anarchical model versus a more organizational model. The great American mystic Howard Thurman, who was a mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "The Spirit spreads not by organization, but by contagion." It doesn't hurt to have organization, but the anarchy and contagion will happen anyway! Independent Catholicism will continue to engage in both, which are not contradictory.

Word of Independent Catholicism is getting out in different ways—and that's good!

**Reflections on  
Five Years Later: Critical Response to *The Other Catholics***

Aguillard: Thank you, Julie. Your presentation was brilliant and lucid, and I loved it. I love that the word is out and that people are looking at the dynamics of how people organize and how traditions evolve!

Quintana: Independent Catholicism in Britain and the United States seems to be tied to a Victorian history of seeking titles, prestige, power and influence. I'm wondering how such running after orders and prestige might adversely affect our credibility and our "contagion," as you put it.

Byrne: As with any study of history, we find in this movement various continuities and discontinuities. In some ways, the past might seem an exotic landscape where we couldn't imagine ourselves. The "Victorian" context of Bishop Arnold Harris Mathew and other progenitors in England, like Frederick Samuel Willoughby and Charles Leadbetter, certainly seemed to be concerned with prestige and power – and yet, interestingly, they were super-countercultural and really reform-minded in many ways, very much going counter to Victorian mores and principles. The Victorian era doesn't have a monopoly on the desire for prestige and power! Even then, Independent Catholicism possessed a countercultural streak that critiqued and attempted to reform Catholicism at the time. The criticisms today by Independent Catholics of clericalism, power, prestige, titles and ordination are very robust, and yes, we're also aware of the outliers who abuse clerical trappings. I find that Independent Catholicism is going more in the direction pointed out by a scholar of Quakerism, who noted that the goal of Quakerism is not to have no clergy; its goal is to have no laity – the priesthood of all believers! The radical individualism of some versions of Independent Catholicism can lead in the direction of everyone being clergy, where the clergy are normal people, like everyone else! That's a super-healthy corrective to the ongoing clericalism of the past in other versions of Christianity, including Roman Catholicism.



Quintana: I have suggested in the past that one way to overcome the proliferation of bishops in this movement – the competition of miters – is to immediately consecrate everyone!

Byrne: Leave your miters at home!

Quintana: Exactly.

Brohl: One reviewer felt that you promoted the idea in your book that Independent Catholicism is central, not marginal, to Catholicism. Is that what you meant to convey? If so, could you say more about that?

Byrne: That was an accurate representation of what I was saying in the book. Basically, the argument is that Independent Catholicism exposes the riffs, fissures and possibilities, the vacuums and excesses of the totality of Catholicism of which it is part. Independent Catholicism is not on the margins of Catholicism; it's where it all happens! It is experimenting and trying out things that larger Catholic bodies think about but, due to their institutional channels, can't or won't do. I call Independent Catholicism the "arts incubator" for larger Catholicism! It's the "black sheep" of Catholicism, the entrepreneurial hub or scientific laboratory of larger Catholicism, where everything is being tried! You all deserve credit: You're taking on Catholicism, you're telling the truth, you have no fear of failing! Experiments don't always work, so "holy implosions" are to be expected. Larger bodies place an incredible priority on continuity and organizational durability, so they are unable to acknowledge the "ferment and froth" in the mix, to cite the phrase of Catherine Osborne. The "ferment and froth" happen in Independent Catholicism!

Vanni: Julie, I want to acknowledge you for your energy and your erudition. I want to acknowledge you for your unrelenting commitment and your fabulous humility: It takes a certain level of character to say, "Let's look at what the critics say!" What an awesome way for us to continue to expand and develop our thinking! My Ph.D. focused on the intersections of ecclesiology, liturgical theology and organizational leadership theory, and I never once read the words "Independent Catholic" or "Old Catholic" in a single book during all of my graduate and doctoral studies. I understand

what it means for people to discover us and to think, “Wow!” We had a similar experience in May: Jayme said, “Let’s pull together a conference on the Philippine Independent Church!” And we all thought, “Really?” And then we found out that there are millions of people in the Philippine Independent Church! A couple of things stood out for me during your presentation. I loved your four S’s, and the one that really grabbed my attention was “self-definition.” Two things strike me as being so problematic for our movement here in the United States. We have some clergy in our movement who are very militant in insisting that we are “Old Catholic” – even while the Union of Utrecht insists that the “Old Catholics” in the United States are part of the Episcopal Church. We have very substantive differences with Episcopalians, though, so there are major impediments to the idea that we’re all going to be fabulous Episcopalians! Our self-definition gets lost. The other challenge is that many Independent Catholic communities here in the U.S. are formed in the American experience of Roman Catholicism, which has so many profound distinctives—and some of them are amazing and beautiful. I’m not ready to chuck them overboard so quickly! Can you say anything more about your fourth “S” of self-definition? Where did that idea come from? What does it mean for you? And how might we apply that term or that principle to our communal lives and jurisdictional lives?

Byrne: I’m so glad to hear of your scholarship. “Self-description” is actually an “S” that is not so clearly delineated in my book. At a presentation of the book at a Church of Antioch event, Father Scott Carter suggested the fourth “S” of self-description. A lot of categorization occurs in religious studies, so that distinction really makes sense. The U.S. Census no longer tracks religious affiliation, which would be super-helpful information for scholars of religion who are interested in how people self-report and self-describe. The Pew Center for Research on Religion and Public Life is the gold-standard private foundation that surveys Americans about their religious affiliation. Scholars of religion need to be careful about getting into the business, particularly if they’re affiliated with a church that’s affiliated with a bishop who’s affiliated with the pope. Scholars of religion have to

be careful about being theological, or about saying, “Who says *they’re* Catholic?” This makes us expand the conversation—and this isn’t unique to Catholicism. Scholars of Mormonism, for example, deal with the fact that many people self-identify as Mormons but are not in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. What do you do with that? As scholars, we have to find objective ways of dealing with this. That was really the starting point for adding “self-description” as a fourth “S” to describe the essence of Catholicism. You can adhere to the other three S’s—sacraments, saints and apostolic succession—and still not self-identify as Catholic. There are other branches of non-Catholic Christianity that have those three, but being Catholic is not important to them. Objectively, it seems that a person’s self-definition as “Catholic” should be part of what should count for being Catholic. Defining “Catholic” is an intra-Catholic discussion, not a discussion to be had with scholars in advance. I tell my students, “I’m going to teach you about Islam today. I’m not going to tell you that Sunni or Shia Islam is the right Islam—but Sunni and Shia Muslims certainly have opinions about that. If you’re a Muslim, you should get in the fight. It’s your job to persuade each other.” My bottom line is: Anyone who says they’re Catholic is Catholic—and that may include a lot of people you don’t like!

Ellis: Dr. Byrne, I’d like to echo other people’s gratitude to you for your work, not just professionally, but also personally. Like you, I graduated from Duke. As a Roman Catholic, I thought better about celibacy, so I earned a graduate degree and became a psychologist. It wasn’t until after I had been married to my husband of 35 years that I started to discern a vocation. Obviously, there was no way in hell that I could be a Roman Catholic priest. I was in conversation with the Episcopalians when I heard you on a podcast in my car. I literally pulled the car over to the side of the road, waited until you finished, and then ordered your book from my phone. Please know that your book not only recounts and describes people’s lived experiences; it also shapes people’s lived experiences! I want to thank you for that. I have two questions for you. Your work has challenged and unsettled certain established narratives about Catholicism. After a

careful reading of your book, are we to recast Catholicism as less an institution and more a way of being a Christian? And my second question is: What is your next book on this topic?

Byrne: Thank you very much for that super-moving, heart-pounding story. Go, Blue Devils! You ask whether my book might recast Catholicism less as an institution and more as a way of being Christian. I think so, in the sense that Catholicism is a noun, a referent; it's not synonymous with a single institution, namely the Roman Catholic Church or the Roman Communion. Independent Catholics share a "family resemblance." This is a Wittgensteinian way of categorizing the "family resemblances" of things. It's not a question of judging whether you belong to an organization or not if you possess seven of ten characteristics. The question is: Do you have a "family resemblance" to other people who say they are this? That's really how the four S's function. You say that you're Catholic, and you practice Christianity in a way that is Catholic. You celebrate the seven sacraments. You care about Catholic liturgy and theology—including the communion of saints in some form or fashion. You care about apostolic succession, even if you reject it. My whole impulse was to redefine Catholicism in a way that made it more than just organizationally-focused. My impulse was to widen the penumbra. Honestly, apart from the proposed chapter in the Brill volume, I'm not working on anything related to Independent Catholicism right now, but I love seeing other people continue the scholarship. I will definitely continue to be part of the community. If you ever need a spokesperson outside the movement, or a guest on a podcast, or a quote for the newspaper, I'm here!

D'Arrigo: Julie, this was such an awesome experience to hear you, and I echo all the accolades. I really enjoyed the four S's, particularly self-description. We started our Independent Catholic ministry in 2013, and by 2014 we were looking for a way for people to really feel a part of our movement. I had been in the Anglican community, where mugs were very popular. Autom has many inexpensive religious articles, which is the greatest thing on earth for a startup Independent Catholic church, so we purchased several cases of mugs that said, "100% Catholic." It got really interesting when we started doing ecumenical work with a Southern

Baptist church and they started using our “100% Catholic mugs” as well! When I left the Worldwide Anglican Communion, I came to see Catholicism as a lifestyle choice. 12-step programs speak of “attraction, not promotion,” and that’s one of the greatest joys of Independent Catholicism: We attract, and often we rely on the Roman Church to promote us through its proclamations of us as “excommunicated” or “invalid” or “illicit.” Everyone in this room is a beacon of what it means to be an inclusive Catholic. Thank you for joining us. Hang out with us more!

Byrne: Father D’Arrigo, thank you for your really, really interesting feedback. I will take it under advisement.

Leary: Thank you, Dr. Byrne, for your book. As a “cradle Catholic,” I did my discernment with the Christian Brothers F.S.C., but I didn’t want to be a teaching brother; I wanted to be a priest. Because I didn’t know that there was any other way of being Catholic, I got involved with the Episcopal Church. I married a Congregationalist, and she couldn’t receive communion in the Catholic Church, so we stayed in the Episcopal Church. When I was introduced to the Reformed Catholic Church International and started formation with them, one of the priests gave me a copy of your book, to help me figure out what is going on in this movement—and your book is now required reading in our formation program. I would love for you to write a follow-up volume! We’re delivering sacraments to those who need them, without worrying about people who say, “you’re not this” or “you don’t belong to that” or “you can’t do that!” I’m eternally grateful that you wrote that book. Without it, I’m not sure I’d be doing what I do today!

Byrne: Thank you, Father Leary. I’m so moved, and I treasure the connections I have with all of you. Independent Catholics seem to be good at making me cry! I appreciate your encouragement to continue to study Independent Catholics. I’m no longer on the “inside,” and I sense that there is way more happening among you than I know. I’m not having those conversations all the time, as you all are. These are such exciting times, and I’m so happy for all of you!

Božek: Greetings from St. Louis and from our parish. The addition of your fourth S, self-identity as Catholic, makes me think of the conversations we are having as a nation with respect to trans identity: We should trust our young people when they say, "I am this" or "I am that." We should accept their lived experience as true for them. It's a healthy adult reaction to allow others to self-define, all the while knowing that our self-identity evolves and changes over time. But then, when those teens and college athletes want to compete, we come to a very explosive conversation: What do we do with those who self-identify as a different gender from the gender with which they've been labeled? Universities and intercollegiate sports federations are sorting through those questions, and the conversation is taking place on two levels: in the form of personal affirmation and a very healthy support of every individual's journey of self-discovery and self-identity, but also, as one of your reviewers pointed out, there is also a benefit to some kind of structure or body that helps to reinforce that identity, or that helps to create a "level playing field." We need to agree to the rules by which we'll play! Can you speak to the balancing of those two dynamics: of our natural desire to affirm others' identity as Catholic, but also to honor the structural needs of this world which seeks to define what "Catholic" is and the "rules" by which Catholics play?

Byrne: Thank you, Father Marek. I miss staying at your rectory: You have the best refrigerator snacks ever! It's such an interesting and moving comparison to think of one's self-description as Catholic in parallel to one's self-description in terms of gender identity. Many of us have had to learn real fast about the many ways in which our young people self-identify with respect to gender. We also read the headlines when someone who was born male is now trying to compete in female sports at the college level. Our core compassion with respect to self-identification seems almost irreconcilable with the institutions we create! My research on Independent Catholicism leads me to conclude that more has been made of the contrast between institutions and self-identification or self-description than is necessary. I was exposed to leaders like Archbishop Gundrey of the Church of Antioch, who broke with the past in not excommunicating people right

and left when there are disagreements. Unlike past leaders of the Church of Antioch, he didn't say, "You're out!" And the "holy implosion" occurred partly because he was unwilling to use his positional power to enforce strict boundaries. He once told me that he set boundaries, but that he didn't feel a need to enforce them. If people didn't agree with him, they would "wash out" sooner or later. He welcomed to the Church of Antioch folks who weren't even Christocentric. He simply said, "You're welcomed," and those who worshiped the goddess Diana "washed out" over time. This certainly raises questions of how we handle power. Are there compassionate ways to handle boundaries? Anyone who has been through therapy or the Twelve Steps would say, "Boundaries are essential!" It's an act of compassion to define your boundaries without excommunicating people and violently pushing them away. Archbishop Gundrey was charged to lead an institution, and he did so by saying, "We love you here."

- Božek: We might also learn from what has been happening at Lambeth during the last nine days, and how they have come to embrace their identity while simultaneously tolerating significant differences. That could be a valuable lesson to our movement as well.
- Byrne: In his opening prayer today, Father Carter spoke about humility, which is a hugely-undervalued Christian virtue. We don't know what God has in store for others, so, even if we disagree with them terribly, let's trust that they might be a blessing to someone. We don't have to make a pronouncement about them.
- Robison: My father's family is morbidly Irish Catholic, and, after I had shared the invitations to my ordination, one of my many cousins, who had found your book in a bookstore, was convinced by it that I was joining something real, legitimate and Catholic. Some of my cousins who had not passed the threshold of a church in decades came to my ordination, in part because your book told them that it was safe. I thank you for that.
- Byrne: That's really cool. If I can make any impression on the morbidly Irish Catholic, which is all my tribe, too, then we've done a good thing! Thank you so much.

Furr: I want to say thank you, too. I read your book when it first came out, and it's so nice to put the heart behind the words. I love your energy!

Byrne: Thank you, Reverend Karen. And thank you all for being here. You are the energy of this book, and I just loved discovering that energy and pulling it together into a book. This has been a fabulous conversation, and my heart is full of all the things you've shared with me!



## **A Uniquely American Expression of Independent Catholicism: Remembering Herman Adrian Spruit & Meri Louise Spruit**

Most Rev. Paul Clemens  
Most Rev. Alan Kemp  
Most Rev. Linda Rounds-Nichols  
Very Rev. Scott Carter, Moderator

### *Introduction*

Very Rev. Scott Carter

I'm really looking forward to this beautiful opportunity for us to get closer. Most of you know me. I am not here because I'm an expert on Herman Adrian Spruit. In fact, I never met Herman. I did meet Meri once, in 2007, at a convocation of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch in Salinas, California. Honestly, much of what I have learned about Herman and Meri comes from Dr. Byrne's book or from other folks who are here tonight. Tonight we'll simply take advantage of Jayme's invitation to reminisce and to share what we know, and to stimulate each other's memories as we celebrate Herman Adrian Spruit and Meri Louise Spruit. As Archbishop Alan points out, our saints have flaws. We're no different from anyone else. So, let's talk honestly about them! We'll invite Archbishop Alan to share his memories of Herman and Meri Spruit.

### *Matriarch Meri Louise Spruit*

### *& Archbishop Richard Gundry*

Most Rev. Alan Kemp

Julie spoke to us this afternoon about Archbishop Richard Gundry, who succeeded Meri Louise Spruit as head of the Church of Antioch. He came to Washington to celebrate my marriage to Claudia, and then he dropped the bombshell at our reception that he was going to retire – and that he was appointing me as interim presiding bishop of the Church of Antioch.

There is an “elephant in the room”: that, due to the “holy implosion” described in Julie's book, the Ascension Alliance is not part of the Church of Antioch. As interim presiding bishop, I facilitated the election of the new presiding bishop of the Church of Antioch. Prior to that, Linda Rounds-Nichols and I worked together: She was the dean of Sophia Divinity School, and I, as the interim presiding bishop, was the rector of

the school. Then, after the election, I did not see a place for myself in the organization anymore, so I intended to retire and to focus on taking care of my property and building my relationship with my new spouse. Then the “holy implosion” occurred.

I have no knowledge whatsoever of Herman Adrian Spruit, except for what Meri and others told me, and what I’ve read in our archives. So, everything that I know about Herman is secondhand. Fortunately, Bishop Paul Clemens, who is also here this evening, knew Herman quite intimately.

I do know something about the history of FICOB, the Federation of Independent Catholic and Orthodox Bishops, and I do know something about *Sursum Corda*, which also formed at that time. I’m a relative “youngster” in the Independent movement: I’ve been part of it since 1995. In 1994, I learned of the Church of Antioch from the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. I’m not sure why I took an interest in the Church of Antioch. I was looking for a jurisdiction because the first jurisdiction I affiliated with, the now-defunct Order of St. Thomas, left something to be desired. I was looking for a jurisdiction with a bit more history and gravitas. At the time, Meri Spruit was in Creswell, Oregon, where she had moved after Herman’s death in 1994.

At that time, a gentleman named Harvey Beagle was affiliated with the Church of Antioch. Folks called him Brother Harvey, and he was a seminarian in the Sophia Divinity School who did correspondence studies with the Church of Antioch from prison. He was incarcerated in the state of Washington, where he was convicted of a felony. Meri and Herman took pity on him, giving him a scholarship, so that he could study for free. After Herman’s death, Harvey was released from prison and showed up on Meri’s doorstep. After that, Harvey was very much a part of Meri’s life. Harvey shared his relatively-good computer skills with our movement, and he compiled a directory of all known Independent Catholic bishops and priests who were online at that time. He created an email list and a web group where people could interact. Under Meri’s sponsorship, he actually did quite a lot to bring together people within the Independent movement. He helped Meri, and she relied on him. Brother Harvey put together the FICOB email list, so that Independent bishops could communicate with each other.

Linda and I have talked before about working with people who are recovering addicts and alcoholics. They can be great people! They often have wonderful hearts, and, when they get into recovery, they can be quite delightfully candid, honest and sincere. But they don’t always stay in recovery; they sometimes relapse. We all suspected that Brother

Harvey was in recovery, that he was a recovering alcoholic or addict. Then we discovered that he was an active alcoholic and addict. It didn't take long for Meri to begin calling me, and I would visit her. I was never baptized as a child, so Meri baptized me when I joined the Independent Catholic movement. I'm one of the few clergy in the movement who have been baptized within the Independent Catholic tradition! Meri confirmed me and shared with me minor orders. After that, Meri often reached out to me as a trusted, grounding influence, and she shared with me of her problems with Harvey. She felt very controlled by Harvey. She would become extremely upset when Harvey disappeared to local bars or brought addicts to her property, which now had a chapel. She complained when things and money went missing. Harvey certainly took advantage of Meri, manipulating her, and sometimes even becoming verbally aggressive with her. Meri was in a bad spot, and she needed help. I helped Meri pack up Harvey's things and move him in my Mazda pickup truck to a hermitage property that the Church of Antioch owned in Washington state.

Harvey began to send Meri emails, suggesting that he was observing and tracking her, watching her movements, and that he had purchased a rifle with scope—and Meri decided to hightail it for California, to rejoin her daughter, Carol Lauderdale, in Santa Cruz. Meri moved there, leaving me to pack up her things in Creswell, Oregon and get them down to her. At that time, the Church of Antioch archives went to Richard Gundrey, whom I first met at the Church of Antioch's convocation in 1996.

Richard was a very astute, stable, kind, loving human being, and Meri turned over the day-to-day operations of the church to him in 1996 or 1997. Meri had been consecrated a bishop in 1986—perhaps the first woman bishop in the U.S. Independent Catholic movement—and she remained the matriarch of the Church of Antioch through 2005, and Richard became the *de facto* leader of the Church of Antioch at that time. He moved the headquarters for the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch and the Sophia Divinity School to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he had a solid ministry with 50 or 60 people at the world-famous Loretto Chapel. He was a schmoozer and really excellent at building relationships with folks. He had become friends with the retired Presbyterian minister who ran the gift shop at the Loretto Chapel, so he got a pretty good deal to rent the chapel every Sunday morning. He celebrated the Holy Eucharist every Sunday morning, rain or shine. He referred to his local ministry as the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch at Santa Fe, and he called the larger church the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malabar Rite.

He also ran the Sophia Divinity School. He was “running our spiritual world”!

We’re all human. Meri and I were quite close. We were very good friends, and I shared with her my concerns: She was not always on top of things, and she may have been too trusting at times in the people that she allowed in her inner circle, but she was a marvelous person, smart as a whip! Bishop Lewis Keizer has shared with me some stories about Herman’s areas of challenge. He had some problems with money, and he would sometimes put a squeeze on people who wanted to become bishops, for contributions to the church. He met Meri, and they got together. To my knowledge, they never legally married, but were common law spouses. They certainly loved each other. Meri thought the world of Herman. She was a well-employed professional, with a steady income. I’m not trying to tell stories on Herman, but the saints were not always unblemished. Significant blemishes may even be a requirement for sainthood! The apostle Paul bitterly complained of a thorn in his side, and it seems that Herman had that, too.

I’ll say a bit about Richard. He took over the day-to-day operations at a very crucial time in my formation. He was the most loving, amazing pastor that I could have had. He was warm, kind and smart. He formed relationships with Roman Catholic prelates and priests. He attracted former Roman Catholic priests into the Church of Antioch. Some of them assisted him; others disappointed him. Richard had asked me a couple of times to be consecrated: in 2004, 2005 and 2006. I declined his first two invitations, believing that the vocation of a priest is superior to that of a bishop. In 2006, I accepted, believing that I could not have much influence within the Church of Antioch unless I accepted episcopal consecration. Richard taught me to show up, to get the ego out of the way, and to minister even when we don’t feel like it.

I think the reason Meri and Richard put a certain amount of trust in me is because of my background. I come from a working class background, and I never planned to go to college. After serving in Vietnam, I had problems surviving. I was semi-homeless and delivering 600 copies of the *Los Angeles Times* beginning at 2:30 a.m. seven days a week. I used the GI Bill to go to college, and that was my entree into professional life. I earned my Master of Social Work and became a licensed mental health professional. I became a licensed therapist and did professional counseling and therapy for about 20 years, and I’m licensed as a clinical social worker, as a marriage and family therapist. Because of my professional education, Meri and Richard put some trust in me.

I began to work more with Richard, than with Meri. I suggested to him that we strengthen the curriculum of the Sophia Divinity School. I knew that, if we wanted to gain the trust of mainline denominations, we had to get our act together. We made the Sophia Divinity School more rigorous and credible than when I first encountered it in the mid-1990s.

After I was consecrated a bishop, a couple of very well-trusted priests within the Church of Antioch emailed me to say that they wanted to encourage Richard to retire. They planned a meeting, that didn't include Richard, with the intent to take over the Church of Antioch. It felt dirty, and I didn't like it, so I forwarded that email to Richard, too, so that he would know what was going on. Yes, there is bad stuff that happens within ecclesiastical organizations—and that was certainly true within the Church of Antioch. Richard was very hurt to discover that two people he loved very much were plotting to oust him. Ultimately, they ended up leaving, and Richard survived. He continued to do a pretty good job. In terms of leadership style, he might have been described as a *laissez faire* leader who allowed everybody to do their own thing, and as a democratic leader, always attempting to arrive at consensus and creating a democratic election process. He was very comfortable with a hands-off approach to leadership.

That's my own honest, candid recollection of the organization that I encountered before I left it. I'll turn it over to Bishop Paul Clemens, who is one of the kindest, gentlest, most understanding and compassionate human beings that I've encountered within the movement. He can better talk about Herman's charisma and spirit.

### *Herman Adrian Spruit (1911-1994)*

Most Rev. Paul Clemens

I first met Herman Adrian Spruit in 1978. Bishop Lewis Keizer, who is here with us, knew him before I did and interviewed him extensively. Lewis' book, *The Wandering Bishops* (1976, 1995), is quite a source of information and covers a number of issues, including a vision to create a worldwide form of spirituality.

Herman taught me, as he taught many others, to put myself in others' shoes. He lived at a unique moment, he had his own charisma, and he was on a search for the Absolute. He wanted to become a living saint! His real goal was to be one with Christ, in communion with the highest Divinity and with all creation. He had that inspiration when he was very young, and, like each of us, he had his own path.

I'd like to read to you his biography from *The Rule of Antioch* (1979, 2002). The back cover of that work reads:

The Rule of Antioch is LOVE. "Antioch" is where the apostles and followers of Jesus gathered and were first called "Christians," and represents the earliest spiritual tradition of those who practiced the teachings of Jesus. This apostolic lineage continues to this day, in a blend of Catholic sacramentalism and mysticism, while its essential message remains the same: "LOVE is not only the Rule of Antioch; it is a Law of Life." This small book by the "Bish," as he was lovingly called, is an introduction to the writings of a mystic, as penned in an ecstasy of Love with all creation. Herman Adrian Spruit was born in 1911, a mystic in search of life's mysteries. Intrigued by the role of a "priest" in early life, he became a Methodist minister and later met bishops in the Old Catholic and Liberal Catholic communities. Recognized for his vibrant and charismatic presence, Herman was consecrated Bishop into seventeen lines of apostolic succession, and became the founding Patriarch of the Worldwide Catholic and Apostolic Church of Antioch-Malabar Rite, in the West. He served side-by-side with his Matriarch, Meri Louise Spruit, who continued his message of LOVE after his passing. "If you could be still enough to hear the Great Ones speaking, as they are always doing, this is what you would hear them say."

Herman was Dutch and didn't speak English as his first language. Early influences led him to imagine becoming as perfect as he could be. He came to the United States, worked at painting houses, and studied to become a priest. He became a Methodist minister and served as one of several ministers in a large 3,000-family church in southern California. But he didn't feel at home there, with the mentality of the people, with the songs and liturgy, or the herd-like communion and constant quest for donations.

Herman was attracted to the Liberal Catholic Church through the writings of Charles Leadbetter and Annie Besant, who spoke of a mystical thread that he had always glimpsed in his life. After ordination and consecration, he sought to consolidate independent bishops of all types: Roman, Eastern, Western, Canadian, African—it didn't matter; he understood them all to be empowered to share the sacraments. When I first met Herman, he emphasized two things: (1) that the Church of

Antioch was intended to preserve the seven sacraments and to empower people through them, and (2) you don't have to have a church. Churches are a big headache! Herman would say, "You can have a church, if you want, but I'm looking for people who are exemplary persons in society! We do our work as priests in society!" I'm a printer and publisher, so my mission as a priest is simply to make the word more known. We publish works on psychology, self-help, comparative spiritual traditions and transpersonal psychology. Herman was already investigating these things and had, for example, read the *Upanishads*.

I studied at Notre Dame University's seminary under Holy Cross priests for seven years, from age 13 to 21, leaving after a long bout with mono. After receiving my M.A. in Comparative Literature, I taught English at Hunter College in New York City. I came out to the West Coast and received a job editing the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. There I met a select group of avant-garde therapists and psychologists interested in the nature of human consciousness and altered states of consciousness as it related to their everyday work as therapists. I joke that I have a Ph.D. in commas: I made sure their articles didn't have any typos. At the same time, I spent five years with a Tibetan lama and wrote fifteen books for him.

When I met Herman Spruit in 1977, I had already developed a more cross-cultural understanding of spirituality. I no longer wanted to be trapped by belief systems. Herman took a deep breath and said, "Good, because there's no belief system to follow here. If you don't know it in your heart, then you don't know it! You don't have to believe anything. I don't care what you believe. It's about what you know and your own direct experience." Herman had learned from various Hindu teachers, Leadbetter, and other more psychic teachers. He asked me, "Do you meditate?" I said, "Yes. I just spent five years with a Tibetan lama, who taught meditation and gave us spiritual exercises to open our chakras." Herman confessed he would often close his eyes at his desk and slip into meditation.

I wasn't one of those who paid for the "privilege" of getting ordained. Instead, I printed stationery and booklets for the Church, including the *Constitution and Statement of Principles of the Church of Antioch*. That work was the original document by Herman's consecrators, Paul Wadle and Charles Hampton. It's a beautiful, eight-page work written in 1972. Fifty years later, it's in need of some updating. They wrote: "At the heart of our faith stands the conviction that the universe is the visible body of God. In God, all things live and move and have their being. We are, in essence, divine beings, created to achieve a consciousness of oneness

with the creative Intelligence. We will realize this exalted achievement by a gradual unfolding of the powers that are latent within us and around us, through growth in understanding, through mastery of ourselves, and through the implementation of currents of divine grace operating in and about us." They also said that the purpose of the Church of Antioch is "to provide a priestly ministry of mature spiritual guidance for all who seek this ultimate goal of human perfection."

I was running a printing and publishing company with 14 employees and five kids at home, so Herman and I talked on the phone about various things: the power of the sacraments, his need for money, how to find and create good apostles, what to teach the teachers who will teach other people, who will in turn teach and enlighten other people and help them discover their own divine nature.

Herman spent a lot of time at his desk corresponding and writing, and his greatest pleasure was to receive a correcting Selectric typewriter, as he was always making mistakes! I advised him to write like Hemingway, with short, simple, clear sentences, since English was not his native language. His typewriter flowed with homilies of his spirited insights and emotions.

I know there's a criticism of bishops taking "bribes" on the side. That happened with many jurisdictions throughout the country and in many other countries. Everyone in the movement seemed impoverished. Meri, his wife, however, was the secretary of a busy real estate office, and was able to support them.

Herman advertised that his consecrations included seventeen lines of apostolic succession going back to Jesus. His goal was to unify all the Independent bishops throughout the country through FICOB, the Federation of Independent Catholic and Orthodox Bishops. He also wanted to empower people through the sacraments and unite everyone under the one banner of Christ's love, so that it radiates in all our hearts.

I'll conclude with the following words, which express Herman's spirit, in his advice to new priests:

Listen here, husband or wife, parent or child, preacher, pastor, parishioner or priest, whoever you are, who strives for the steep ascent on the ladder of evolution: The name of the game is LOVE. That's the point where it starts, the modality by which it continues, the means by which the goal is reached and by which you find the consummation of life. Love is the beginning of all successful striving, the fulfillment of a very positive and constructive mission, the substance of every



noble dream, and the means by which you and I will finally succeed in reaching every worthwhile goal. Love is power. Love is technique. Love is the blueprint. Love is the knack that transforms the nitty-gritty into a new creation, whether it be one of sticks and stones, flesh and blood, moon landings, or the noblest task of all, that of transforming some human plod into the image of the Divine. You who are going out to tell the story of Christ and who, with Him, seek to build a new humanity and a glorious order of life, load up on love! Act as though it were the only action of worth. The Christ message begins, continues, and ends in the middle of the stream of Love. If there is no love in your message, that message will be as vital as an Egyptian mummy.

### *An Archivist's Perspective*

Most Rev. Linda Rounds-Nichols

It has been fun listening to these stories! Like Alan, I'm one of the youngsters in the movement. I did not meet Herman in the flesh; I have only met Herman by reading his works. I did meet Meri, and I had three significant, brief one-on-one conversations with her. Some when she was the dean of Sophia Divinity School. I went through more than one dean at the seminary – which is a whole different story and another part of the problem.

You've heard a lot about Herman. He was a spiritual seeker. He was a Christian, and his homilies were all very faith-based and Christian. He also had other practices. As a child in Germany, he was introduced to the Old Catholic Church through his father's family in Holland. He was a Methodist, and the Methodists sponsored his coming to the U.S. around age 16. As Paul alluded, he didn't speak English very well. He supported his family and returned to high school at age 19. He then went to college, to learn English. After serving as a Methodist minister, he no longer felt that he fit there. He joined a group of the Science of the Mind, and that didn't work for him either. He found Liberal Catholicism, and Bishop Hampton of the Liberal Catholic Church shared with him minor orders. He ended up being ordained as an Independent Catholic. It took him several steps, but he never gave up.

For those of you who aren't part of the Ascension Alliance or the Church of Antioch, you may be wondering, "Why are we listening to this stuff?" It's because Herman was one of the "movers and shakers" back

in the day! Without them back in the 1950s, we wouldn't be here today. It's important that we learn about them and learn from them.

One thing that Herman can teach us is to not give up. When the Methodist Church didn't work for him anymore, he could have gone back to painting houses—except that he had a call from God, who showed him another path, and Herman followed it.

At the last convocation of the Church of Antioch in 2019, someone said that Herman should be named a saint. Herman may have wanted to be a saint, but he remained very human, as Alan suggested. He needed people. He needed Meri. He was a mystic, and he needed someone who could take care of practical, bread-and-butter, day-to-day life.

Meri was an important part of Herman's life during his last 20 years. Other women were important to him as well. In 1934, he married his first wife, Hulda, and they had two sons. They stuck it out for 20 years, until about the time that he left the Methodist Church. What happened? There are stories, but they're hearsay, and Herman and Meri are dead. Herman then married Violet (Walp) Mullard. These women were important in the early days of the Church of Antioch. Then Herman was super-involved with his next wife, Helen Seymour. They worked and taught together. They were married for some four years and divorced, but Helen stuck around after their marriage. Interestingly, Meri met Herman through Helen: Meri had an appointment with Helen, who wasn't at home, but Herman invited her in. Herman and Helen remained friends for quite a while after that, even after Herman and Meri were together. That's another thing that we can learn from them: commitment.

As an immigrant who was learning English, Herman had a hard time, and, as a woman and presiding bishop, Meri had a hard time. Girls just aren't able to play with the "big boys." But Herman persevered, and Meri persevered, and Richard persevered—and that's our foundation! That foundation is solid, but it does have some wacky parts, some parts we might not want to talk about, but that happen in all families.

This presentation isn't simply about Herman and Meri Spruit; it's about us. It's about the reason for our being. It's about our right to be who we are and to do what we do. Herman and Meri are part of our story, and they would probably agree that we're all here to love and serve others! That's our purpose, and, if we can all do that, then we're all saints!

## *Conclusion*

Very Rev. Scott Carter

I want to echo the comment about the Rule of Antioch. When I was first required to read it in seminary, I thought, "Oh, great, this is like the Benedictine rule, and it'll probably tell us what to do and what not to do." But it's not a rule in the sense of laws to be followed. It's really just a "love bomb," with all kinds of metaphysics, some of which is still relevant and useful. And, frankly, there's a lot of stuff in there that I and a lot of people don't accept. Those things don't reflect how we look at things. But it is just impossible for me to read it and not think, "Wow, I really wish I had known Herman in person! I really wish that I could have had a conversation with him!" I encourage you to read Herman's Rule of Antioch. You might find it very inspiring. Herman had a really strong tendency to reduce everything, all theology, to some version of love. He wrote, "We pray God to forgive us our theologizing, as we forgive those who have theologized against us"! Herman also recognized the primacy of love over things like apostolic succession, which is necessary but not sufficient. In his Rule of Antioch, he wrote, "If you are looking for gilded credentials, you could do a lot worse than cling to apostolic succession, but apostolic succession, even though you are owned by 17 of its branches, is as vapid as a brackish swamp, unless there be love in your heart, mind and soul." If you're interested in learning more about Herman and Meri Spruit from an objective and really informative source, you'll find a great deal of explanation and background material in Dr. Byrne's book, *The Other Catholics*. You can read there about his connection to Old Catholicism and all the many things that he did!

**Reflections on  
A Uniquely American Expression of Independent Catholicism:  
Remembering Herman Adrian Spruit & Meri Louise Spruit**

Byrne: Thank you so much for your presentation. I never got to meet Herman in person, but I benefit so much from hearing the history of the oral historians in the Ascension Alliance and Church of Antioch. I interviewed Meri late in her life at her California home; it was one of the highlights of my research. After her death, I continued to talk to her daughter, Carol Lauderdale. All of you are called to a strange path, which is so inspiring and worth the storytelling. One of the reasons that I focused *The Other Catholics* on the Church of Antioch and its lineage was because the Church of Antioch had an archive that has been lovingly preserved by Herman, Meri, Richard, Alan and Linda. Linda did an amazing work of love, with her husband, to archive the boxes that were stored by Richard Gundrey in Santa Fe, and to get them to a state that researchers can now look at them. Without that, *The Other Catholics* could not have been written. I encourage all of you to keep records in your jurisdictions. In some form or fashion, keep records of what you do. Keep them in files, label the files, and pass them on when the leadership changes. Digitize them, if you can. If you feel comfortable doing so, give them to a body outside your own jurisdiction. The University of California at Santa Barbara is the repository for papers of J. Gordon Melton, who collected so much about Independent Catholicism for his *Encyclopedias of American Religion*. That library is open to taking any group's papers, to be professionally archived forever. Think about adding to that collection, so that the researchers of Independent Catholicism, including all of you, can keep having access to it!

Carter: Following Linda's urging that we properly appreciate the women of the movement, I'll quote from Dr. Byrne's book of her meeting with Meri in the 1980s. She described Meri as "attunement, charm and kindness. And when I saw the matriarch process down the aisle of the Episcopal church where the consecration took place, her regal presence took my breath away....On the altar, she rested a lot, but still seemed the most vibrant force up there."

D'Arrigo: This was really informative for me. What strikes me is that there was no "cradle Catholicism" involved in the founding of the Church of Antioch. That completely fascinates me. I have always assumed that all Independent Catholicism comes out of some other Catholic body, so I just assumed that Antioch and Ascension came from former Roman Catholics or former Old Catholics, or something in between. What I'm hearing instead is really inspirational. My jurisdiction, the Convergent Christian Communion, has been around for a blip comparatively, and I'm one of only a few people who come from any sort of Catholic background in the entire communion. I thought we were an aberration, but now I'm realizing that we're not. Antioch and Ascension tie to Convergent Catholicism and to my own spiritual journey. I can appreciate how awkward it sounds to say that Herman Spruit "got himself consecrated." We hear that phrase from our own context today, with a million different jurisdictions within Independent Catholicism. In Spruit's day, though, there were very few options if you wanted to seek out a bishop and start your own movement. It's so reminiscent of the first-century Church! I've always had so much respect for all of you in these two jurisdictions, but now I'm even more blown away, and I'm going to spend more money on Spruit books!

Carter: Let me just squeeze in that Herman never said, "I need to get myself consecrated" or "I got myself consecrated." He followed his own spiritual journey.

D'Arrigo: As Linda suggested, it's important that we talk about our elders—and there's something very American about this story of the Spruits. I'm fascinated by it!

Rounds: It would be 51 years before a cradle Roman Catholic, Mark Elliott Newman, would lead the Church of Antioch as its presiding bishop. Richard Gundrey was an Episcopalian, so he was the first sacramental Christian to lead Antioch. I totally agree with Julie that archives are super-important. I don't know about your jurisdictions, but we're no longer using typewriters or carbon paper. We have documents on our laptops and external drives that may be password-protected. What will happen if we don't have hard copies of those records? 50 years from now, which records will be

available, and which will have been lost in cyberspace? Please think about how you're preserving history!

Ellis: This has been very informative, and I appreciate the diversity of religious experience and the synthesis of all in love. It's really hard to argue with the statement that it all comes down to love! Just a minor footnote to those who suggest that we wouldn't have Independent Catholicism in the U.S. today without Old Catholicism. An exception to that, of course, is my own community, the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America (CACINA), which was started when Dom Carlos Duarte Costa, a Roman Catholic bishop in Brazil, sent a bishop to New Mexico in 1949 expressly for the purpose of beginning the Apostolic Catholic Church here. Our bishops directly descend through his lines of apostolic succession, and all bishops who incardinate into CACINA are subconditionally consecrated, to receive his lines of apostolic succession. This presentation has been wonderful.

Rounds: Duarte Costa is another elder in our movement!

Carter: There are also Eastern lines of apostolic succession that go back through the Russian Orthodox bishops in the mission territory of Alaska.

Kemp: I'm aware of a Ukrainian Orthodox line as well.

Byrne: Michael Angelo reminds us that Roman Catholicism is the largest, most influential church from which people come to this movement, but it has never been the only one!

Clemens: Herman Spruit caught a lot of flak for ordaining women. He was one of the first bishops to ordain women and recognize their equality as priests or priestesses. As part of his idea of joining everyone under one flag, Herman even approached Roman Catholic bishops, in an attempt to get them to unify with the worldwide Catholic Apostolic movement. He thought: Why not approach the biggest group? He was bold, and Roman bishops rejected him outright. The big discussion in the 1970s was over validity and liceity, so Herman really went after lines of apostolic succession that stretched back to Antioch, to the origins of the Church, and he wanted to create a spirituality that traced back to Antioch, too. Like the stars at night, Herman saw everyone as part of the one, big universe of universal, worldwide Catholics.

Very few people could understand or fully appreciate his big vision. A few of us felt the same calling. We wanted to serve and radiate love from our hearts. We tried to find people who were on the same wavelength. In our phone conversations, Herman and I discussed how everything is frequency and vibration. Meditation takes us deeper into that vibration. Herman looked for qualified people – not an easy task. He made a big mistake once, when he ordained a homosexual; back in the late 1970s, that wasn't too acceptable. Herman took a chance, saying, "Everybody is welcome to the altar. Everybody is welcome to communion with Christ!" At the deepest level possible, communion doesn't involve sexuality, gender or color. Herman was way ahead of his time in that regard.

D'Arrigo: Given that Spruit promoted peace and love in the 1970s, was he ever accused of being a cult leader, by chance?

Clemens: No, not at all. He was a lot older than many of that generation. In the 1970s, he was in his 60s.

Byrne: California's experimental environment may have protected him from that. California had very open, experimental attitudes with respect to religion in general. He wasn't hanging out with East Coast prudes who might have considered him a cult leader. So many streams of spirituality and religion—inside and outside of Christianity—vibed with him and what he was trying to do. I sense that many people supported his central message of love.

Carter: As Julie reports in her book, Independent Catholicism does have a "fringe." There were Independent Catholic masses that involved sex acts—but that was not an accusation that was leveled at Herman. As Julie points out, Vilatte, though not belonging to them, was sympathetic to more esoteric organizations.

Byrne: Vilatte was in conversation with people in French esotericism, which overlapped with Independent Catholicism, but Vilatte himself was too conservative for those kinds of practices—and Herman, after all we've said about his experimentation, was way too conservative for that kind of stuff. The idea that all components of the human experience, including sexuality, should be caught up in

God's love in the ritual act of consecration was from a much earlier era, mostly in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century France and England. I haven't heard of much of that here in U.S. Independent Catholicism, with the Puritan stamp on American culture.

Robison: I was recently reading that one of Spruit's consecrators, Wadle or Hampton, had a file in the Hoover Building. He was looked at suspiciously for his ordination in Europe at a time when the FBI was investigating everyone!

Kemp: I believe that was Charles Hampton of the Liberal Catholic Church.

Robison: Herman had suspicious friends!

Carter: Herman was definitely connected with the Liberal Catholic Church, and many consider the theosophical to be highly suspect.

Robison: That made him extremely suspicious. I have filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the file that the FBI has on Herman and Meri Spruit and their laundry list of suspicious friends. I think the executive summary will be that he was a "harmless kook"...

Clemens: That would not surprise me.

Robison: ...which is probably what the executive summary of *my* FBI file says!

Byrne: You may be onto something, John. The FBI had a file on anyone at that time who had a socialist or communist friend. We're exploring this now in the discipline of Religious Studies, and there's actually an edited volume called *The FBI and Religion*, which discloses the extent to which U.S. intelligence services have tracked, surveyed and infiltrated U.S. religious organizations for political purposes. I ran across this while doing the research for my book. The Independent Orthodox in New Orleans and the United States were heavily infiltrated by intelligence services and coopted for U.S. government purposes during the 1960s and 1970s. I'm not impugning or adding anything to what we already know of Herman and Meri, which is that they were countercultural people who would likely have files by the FBI!



Clemens: Herman tried so hard to be accepted, by Roman bishops and by others, until the last years of his life when he just didn't care whether people accepted him or not. That was quite a leap that he had made. Richard Gundry, who really didn't know Herman, did the same thing. Richard showed up in his bishop robes in Santa Fe and celebrated the weddings that Roman Catholic priests wouldn't. He went to conventions and events where Roman Catholics were. We was not embarrassed to make himself known. Herman couldn't pull that off. He was more concerned to pull together various lineages. He often spoke of the sacraments as "empowerments." Every time we celebrate the sacraments, we empower others, regardless of whether they're physically present. We've sending out those waves and radiating love from our hearts!

Carter: I'll leave you with one final taste of Herman, a quote from his *Rule of Antioch*:

Jesus made it abundantly clear that love is both the center and circumference of his philosophy. What was his basic creed? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, strength and soul, and thy neighbor as thyself." That's our creed. Whether you aspire to be a preacher or a priest, or for that matter, a lay person, your continuing field of penetration must be in the ministry of love. Your noblest concern is that of living, showing, believing, radiating and cultivating love. This is not only the Rule of Antioch; it is the first rule of the Christian movement. No matter how much you love, you never have enough of it. The greater your love, the vaster is your Christian joy, the more all-encompassing is your peace, and the greater are the rewards of Christian living. Eternity begins right here. It could be a reality for you this minute. You enter eternity through the door of love. There is no priority in this whole catalog of Christian virtues superior to love. Consider that day lost in which love within you did not increase, expand and grow. Let us learn something new, deep and compelling each day about the splendor and reality of love. Let each day be dedicated to finding new and more unique ways of applying the love we have within us to all the conditions and circumstances

of life. To those of us who are clergy, love is central and supreme. Jesus made this abundantly clear, too. Do our labors and our lives clearly reflect that fact?

Ellis: What an eloquent quote. It could just as easily have been penned by Pope Francis!

Carter: In full disclosure, you'll also find in the *Rule of Antioch* numerology and all kinds of things that Pope Francis would not have been comfortable saying, but, to be fair, the core of the message overlaps with much of our thinking!

Clemens: Perhaps Herman would have felt that his life had a purpose if those he consecrated or ordained kept up his mission and grew his movement. That was his profound wish in the end. Herman would say, "let go and let God," and Richard always ended his messages with "See the Christ in everyone." Perhaps those will be their epitaphs!

J. Walker: I am currently pastor of what used to be the Church of Antioch at Santa Fe. We recently renamed it the Cosmic Christ Sophia Community because the liturgy we use, which was primarily written by Archbishop Richard Gundry, speaks about the Cosmic Christ, and his seminary was named Sophia Divinity School. The name feels like a more explicit expression of what we are about, and it also acknowledges the split that happened in the Worldwide Church. I'm a youngster. I came to this movement in 2005, so I didn't meet Herman or Meri, but I spent a lot of time at the altar with Archbishop Richard, and I have a good sense of him. When I first came from the Episcopal Church to the Church of Antioch at the Loretto Chapel, I experienced an incredible force of energy. Like you, Julie, I have wept many times. I love the energy I feel. It's not just words or traditions. It is a reification of the sacraments, the "empowerments" that Bishop Paul Clemmons speaks about. That energy really touches me, and it touches a lot of people. In our services, we strive for the beautiful balance of structure and the freedom to experience what is truly true for us. Doing so collectively in a group amplifies the experience.

Carter: Thank you so much, Mother, Jenny. Are you using the Loretto Chapel these days?

J. Walker: No. We've been on Zoom since the pandemic. Archbishop Richard had a wonderful relationship with the former owner of the Loretto Chapel, which is a privately-owned property. Six or seven years ago, it was transferred to the younger generation, which raised the rent to a level that was unsustainable for us. Many people left when we stopped worshiping in Loretto, which is one reason why we changed our name from "church" to "community." Our focus is now on coming together as a community, regardless of the space, to support one another and be soul-friends on this wonderful journey.

Ellis: I still feel the warm embrace of Herman's quote about love. When we set that alongside Jesus' statements about love, we recognize that Jesus loved in ways that liberated people. It seems that Herman and Meri embodied that liberating love!

## **Forming a Communion of Communities: The Ecumenical Catholic Communion**

Chancellor George von Stamwitz

For 15 years, I have served as the Chancellor of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC). I'm a lawyer by training, and I've been an environmental lawyer for most of my career. Mid-career, I graduated from theology school, majoring in biblical studies, which aided my involvement in the development of the ECC. As Chancellor, I report to the Presiding Bishop, and I serve for an undefined term. My role is largely advisory, and I've been on the ECC Leadership Council for the last 15 years. Regardless of my title, the comments below are my own.

Today I'll try to explain our charisms, our legal structure, how our theology is reflected in our structure, and I'll close with some of our challenges. Then Bishop Frank Krebs, our current Presiding Bishop, will join us and hit on topics that are really dear to him, like our role in the World Council of Churches and our international communities.

At present, the ECC has 33 or so communities from coast to coast, and we have eight or nine communities in Europe. We have two religious orders, a Franciscan order and a Benedictine order, that collectively might have 25 people between the two of them.

### **Charisms of the ECC**

The primary charism of the ECC is sacramental justice. We have simply moved past all the issues of exclusion that are strangling and challenging other denominations. Gender is not an issue for us. Sexual orientation is not an issue. Being married or unmarried is not an issue. Being divorced is not an issue. Our Eucharistic table is open to all, with no exceptions. Our moral theology has not been an issue, either: People have been very content to embrace the individual conscience that we cherish.

We like to see the sacrament of the Eucharist as a prophetic moment. We see wide-eyed eight- or nine-year-old girls staring at the women who preside at mass. Roman Catholic nuns—though they can't have their photo taken with us—come just to see and be part of our worship. They see that the world doesn't end when a woman stands at the altar! Even before gay marriage was legal, we blessed the unions of folks who could be themselves at church for the first time. You can't put a price on those experiences! For whatever reason, we've gotten sacramental justice right.

The ECC sees and talks about Catholicism differently from other Catholic forums. We are influenced by the mystical tradition of the Church that says that God is equally in everyone everywhere. We're influenced by Thomas Merton, Howard Thurman and Richard Rohr. We're influenced by Elizabeth Johnson and Joan Chittister. We eschew dualistic, top-down ways of looking at the world. We see God as transcendent and immanent. God is in each one of us. In fact, God is in everyone! We strive to articulate this Mystery and the journey we're on to the next generation. And our way of talking about theology balances the "boys' stories" – the patriarchal way of talking about faith – and is entirely Catholic. It's exciting. It makes for great preaching. A mystical theology is certainly one of our gifts.

A third charism is a bottom-up ecclesiology that places the power with the people. We recognize the charisms of all: from the janitor, to the little old lady in the back pew, to the priest. Our balance of power is very different from other Catholic traditions.

### **Giving Structure to Charisms**

How did we evolve the structure for these charism? We have an eight-page *Constitution* that you can read online, along with 30 or 40 pages of *Statutes*. Those documents have been heavily negotiated over the last 20 years, and they build a larger structure than we need – but we also recognize that we're pushing this ark into the next generation!

At the parish level, the parish council is the "boss," the "employer of record" of the clergy. Our bishops do not employ or pay anyone. The people employ and pay their clergy. I help communities to organize themselves. We encourage employment contracts with term limits, so that they're revisited every few years, and so that clergy never overpower any local situation. Lots of power and authority is delegated to the pastor, for sure, but some decisions must be made with a vote of the people. The people decide who their pastor will be, what space they'll be in, and whether their relationship with the ECC should change.

The diocesan bishop manages the faculties of the clergy in their region, and the presiding bishop is the ordinary of those communities that are not yet organized into a diocese. In this model, liability remains at the local level. Our communities are all individual corporations, and they all possess liability insurance. They "stand on their own two feet" in terms of the acts and omissions that might create liability.

We have four structures at the national level. First, we have the Office of the Presiding Bishop, which is an elected position by the delegates to the synod. The Presiding Bishop is elected for a four-year term. Our current Presiding Bishop, Frank Krebs, is retiring in October and has

declined to run for a third term, so we'll elect a new presiding bishop at our synod in October. The Presiding Bishop is the chief executive of the community and is the only person who can speak or negotiate for the whole. The Presiding Bishop sends the press releases and negotiates the intercommunion agreements!

Second, all bishops in the ECC are invited to be on the Council of Bishops, and all elected bishops have a vote. According to our *Constitution* and *Statutes*, our bishops teach, lead and ordain, but they also exercise a judicial function: The Council of Bishops hears the appeals in cases of removal of faculties for alleged misconduct. They also serve a judicial function when it appears that our *Constitution* has been violated. That almost happened this year, when somebody claimed that our *Constitution* had been violated, but the matter was resolved before reaching the Council of Bishops. If someone in the ECC, for instance, forbade women from saying mass, which is totally against our *Constitution*, the Council of Bishops would remedy that through their judicial function.

The laity are represented at the national level by our House of Laity. Each parish sends delegates based on its size. During our biennial synod, the House of Laity prepares and approves our two-year budget. That's a somewhat-traditional notion: The lay people have the power of the purse! The House of Laity is also a legislative body: They amend our *Constitution* and *Statutes*. They also elect the Presiding Bishop.

Our fourth national structure, the House of Pastors, has two delegates from each community. Whereas the House of Laity often rolls over, with lay people serving on it for two or three years, the delegates to the House of Pastors often remain for years. The House of Pastors is an important place of sharing and support for our clergy and leaders. The House of Laity is focused more on business, and the House of Pastors is more about community and what we need to do to keep clergy healthy. The House of Pastors is consulted by and approves various actions of the House of Bishops. It's one way to involve clergy in critical—and sometimes controversial—decisions.

The synod is the ultimate authority of the ECC. It meets every two years and usually lasts for days. The voting on legislation and the election of the Presiding Bishop take place at synod. We also have a lot of meetings, talks and workshops. Visitors are welcomed. Our synod will be in St. Louis, Missouri in October.

## Some of Our Challenges

What are some of our challenges? We've had significant struggles over the years with respect to the role of bishops. We have more conservative and more liberal views on this issue, and people have left the ECC over this. Some people think that bishops should have more power than they do in the ECC. Eight years ago, for instance, when Frank was proposed for Presiding Bishop, no bishops were part of the nominating committee. For some people, it was scandalous to think that bishops don't run the ECC or "baptize" important decisions. Our bishops also have no power of property, and they don't employ clergy. It's a strength and a weakness. We see the bishop as a leader and unifier, a teacher who does not yield power or clout.

A second challenge has been, as I call it, "putting nouns before verbs" in the development of dioceses. Some folks are adamant that every community should be part of a diocese, so that they can have a relationship with a bishop. We've found, though, that you can't put the noun—a diocesan structure—before the verb—the act of connecting people, building relationships, and building trust. It's from the depth of those relationships that we call bishops. On a couple of occasions, people wanted to have dioceses and bishops so badly without relational connections, and that never works well. In a couple of instances, we had to "reboot." We have found that it's better to take things slow, build connections, allow communities to discern whether they want to join together as a diocese, in order to enjoy community rather than simply enjoy a structure. It's been a learning moment for us.

A third challenge is the fact that the ECC is an army of volunteers. When people volunteer for jobs, they don't always have the necessary skills, or it may be a challenge to place them in an appropriate role. We experience those challenges. We've not been successful in getting grants or other resources that would enable us to appropriately pay people. And burnout is real. We're like any startup. On the one hand, it's amazing to see what people have done to make the ECC a reality. On the other hand, it's sad to see them doing it on so few resources. I joke that our entire annual budget of the ECC is less than what a person may spend to remodel their kitchen! I had lunch today with a 40-year-old woman who is theologically trained, has spectacular gifts for liturgy, and is thinking about joining the ECC—but she also needs to be able to make a living. Finding resources for such people is a challenge for us.

The final challenge that I'll highlight is the fact that our "hero generation" of clergy and lay leaders is aging. They pastored communities for little or no pay. They believed in this cause, in this model of being Catholic, and in our charisms. And now they're retiring.

Bishop Peter Hickman and Bishop Frank Krebs are in this category. Every young organization struggles with the challenge of moving beyond its founders, its “hero generation.” Our synod in October will discuss how to take this model forward, how to take this incredible theology and this wonderful praxis of inclusion and equality into the next generation!



**Reflections on  
Forming a Communion of Communities:  
The Ecumenical Catholic Communion**

Leary: You spoke of keeping the liability at the local level. What do you do with the possible liabilities that might arise from the fact that you, in essence, have a bishop who operates on paper as the CEO?

Stamwitz: That is a risk. Our local communities have liability protection with insurance, because they are employers.

Leary: You don't have general liability coverage for the ECC?

Stamwitz: We do. We're smart enough to know that the point you're making could possibly, perhaps even likely, be alleged, but our documents are designed to keep the liability at a lower level.

Brohl: In 2002, as a member of the United Catholic Church, I was asked to reach out to other jurisdictions, to inquire into possibilities for intercommunion. I got the very strong impression that many Independent Catholic jurisdictions wanted nothing to do with being associated with others. Bishops, councils and other higher-ups in these jurisdictions were very protective of their "turf." I also had the very strong impression that, though they might deny it, many jurisdictions were trying to resemble the Roman Catholic Church in many ways. I perceived the ECC to be part of that category. Based on what you've said, I still sense a strong attachment to Roman Catholic roots. I'm interested in your perspective on that.

Stamwitz: That's interesting. Our theology of inclusion is so contrary to current Roman Catholic stances and theology. I would dare to say that we've moved way past Roman Catholicism in this regard. We have retained the structure of bishops, clergy, deacons and lay people, but we've shifted and reallocated power. Is there tension in this model? Sure.

Brohl: In what ways might the ECC be similar to Rome, particularly with respect to theology?

Stamwitz: Our *Constitution* references the Catholic creeds as something important to us. They also reference Old Catholic documents. We definitely tie ourselves to Catholic tradition.

Brohl: Do you believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

Stamwitz: Yes. There may be some diversity across communities about what exactly that might mean, but we often talk about the Eucharist in traditional terms. Many of our communities would speak of atonement, though, in ways that are different from the Roman Catholic Church.

Brohl: When you mentioned the House of Pastors, you noted that clergy are involved in critical matters of the church. You don't involve the laity in such critical matters, say, as the beliefs of the ECC?

Stamwitz: Our beliefs are contained in our *Constitution* and *Statutes*, which are approved by our House of Laity. The House of Laity would have to approve any change to our beliefs. We map out the roles of the House of Pastors and House of Laity in our *Constitution*. The House of Pastors, for instance, would be consulted for a possible intercommunion agreement, whereas the House of Laity would not be consulted for that.

Mathias: Chancellor von Stamwitz, you spoke to a great degree about the structure of the ECC. I'm wondering if you might be willing to "pull back the curtain" a bit for us, and speak to how it is that the ECC has succeeded in being a "communion of communities" in a movement that is largely characterized by jurisdictions that are communities of *clergy*. It seems that what makes the ECC very distinct in our movement is that it is a "communion of communities." How have you all succeeded in pulling together such a thing?

Stamwitz: Much of what we do is structured by our *Constitution*, which is hopefully creating a relational, Catholic community. We want to be connected and accountable in our faith. We use those words all the time in the ECC. As Chancellor, my job is often simply to ask, "Who's accountable? Who's making this decision?" And our Catholic instinct is to be connected. The ECC is a voluntary association, and you can leave anytime you want, but if you want to be connected and pool resources and have these relationships, where you can be part of the team, then, by all means, let's be together! One

attraction of the ECC is its Catholic instinct for being connected and accountable.

Buffone: I want to thank George for really stressing that point. The ECC is all about building relationships and feeling connected to the Communion, either throughout the country and/or abroad. We take that seriously, and we put time and energy into making that happen. Our regional delegates to the House of Pastors host monthly or bimonthly meetings, and our House of Laity hosts social hours, just like many of us are doing monthly. We really put a lot of effort into building these connections—and people want to do it. We also have working groups that involve laity and clergy. We're all working on liturgical resources together, and we're working together on fundraising. Thanks to the gift of technology, this has really exploded these past two and a half years. Prior to the pandemic, we had 125 people gather every two years for our synod, and we were all eager to talk with each other, reconnect, share resources, and attend workshops. Now we can do that as frequently as we want through Zoom. We really put a lot of time, effort, energy and passion into making it happen.

Quintana: Going back to Father Jerry's question: Whereas Rome holds as dogmas the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, we [in the ECC] do not. Individual communities might celebrate them or have certain pious belief, but we don't hold them as doctrines that are necessary for salvation. We really abide by the principle of subsidiarity, where each congregation is autonomous but builds relationships with other communities. We truly are a "communion of communities"!

Vanni: Thank you, George, for doing such an awesome job representing us! I journeyed with another jurisdiction for a while, and one of the things that made me decide to discontinue that path was that God was pointing me in this direction: The ECC operationalizes what it says that it's about. I did my Ph.D. on dialogical leadership as it related to the Roman system, and it's very important to me to see that what is on paper is lived. Frank mentioned the principle of subsidiarity: That is a principle of Roman Catholic social teaching. Things should be decided at the most local level!

One of the things that I love about the ECC is that many of us have pastoral councils, where the clergy are consulted, but the laity vote. That's the case in our community here in Eden Prairie. Does my opinion as pastor carry weight? Yes, I'd like to think that our leadership would take seriously any grave concern—but it's *their* community. Our "communion of communities" is comprised of truly independently-governed communities. The 12-step movement has a parallel: Each group is autonomous, except in matters that affect other groups. George mentioned the question that was raised this year of whether our *Constitution* was observed with respect to a bishop ordaining candidates who might not be adequately prepared for ordination. Multiple people were concerned by this, and the question was: How does this affect the whole? Will we hold bishops accountable to our *Constitution*? I love that dance! Is it easy? No. Sometimes it gets really messy, and there are several personalities at play. There's a tension between wanting a healthy body and an operational group, and remembering that the Church is the people of God gathered at the table in its most local expressions.

Plemmons: I can give examples: Neither my ECC diocese nor my bishop has a coat of arms. Our diocesan council has not felt it important enough to pull together a committee that's geographically representative of our diocese to agree on a coat of arms! Consensus is so important. One of my Roman Catholic liturgy profs once said that the theology of Mrs. Murphy in the third pew is equally as valid as the theology of Father Francis at the altar. We have to keep that in mind. I'm a supply clergy at Emmaus in Olympia, Washington. They didn't come up with their name until they heard the Emmaus story one Sunday, and suddenly there was consensus to have that as their name! I call my ministry Rainier Open Catholics, because we're in the Rainier Valley. That's not a proper congregation name, but we'll find our name eventually. In the meantime, we make decisions locally. We tinker with our liturgy. We choose the missal and the lectionary that we use. We rotate through a number of creeds. We even use a quote by Thomas Merton as our creed from time to time. We have the freedom to make decisions within our local communities.

- L. Walker: My question flows from my experience as a Roman Catholic priest. How would you respond to the oft-repeated criticism that, if a congregation chooses the pastor, the pastor's role as a prophet is limited or curtailed because they dare not challenge the community too much?
- Stamwitz: My own sense is that this has not been an issue. In fact, we see a prophetic energy that resides not only with our clergy, but also in the pews! I've not encountered that as a problem.
- Mathias: Our movement is known for its multiplication of bishops. In our recent book, *Tradition and Adaptation*, Father Mark Božek of St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis suggests that, if we were to conceive of the bishop as the overseer of several local communities, the ECC may be the only jurisdiction in the United States today that might be justified in having a bishop. If we were to agree that bishops are necessary only as the overseers of multiple communities, is the ECC justified in having so many bishops? That is, we see some six active bishops on your website—for the 33 or so communities that you mentioned in your opening remarks. What has your experience led you to conclude in this respect?
- Stamwitz: Our theory is that we wanted our bishops to be in relationship with their communities. It's hard to be a bishop in California and be in relation with somebody in southern Florida. Modern technology might make that easier, but the idea of geographic proximity has been important for us. Having a bishop with only six, seven, eight or nine communities doesn't scandalize me, but we certainly have to be careful.

**Building Bridges:  
The Ecumenical Efforts of  
the Ecumenical Catholic Communion**

Bishop Francis Krebs

I'm really happy to be here, and I really strongly believe in the importance of intentional ecumenical relationships. Here in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), we are our own entity, we have our own name, we think of ourselves as a church, and our impulse is toward communion. We're wanting to connect all the time! We are especially interested in connecting with other people who are "on the same wavelength." We may not be identical to them, but, in essence, we're doing the same thing, and we recognize the essence of the Catholic tradition when we see it. We recognize the humanity of one another, and we want to connect with that humanity.

For us, as Catholics, for instance, we see the Eucharist at the center of our lives. That's a deep part of our tradition. When we see that others share a similar understanding of the Eucharist, it warms our cockles. We just want to connect with those people! Practically speaking, how does our desire to connect with others look in our organization?

We belong to the National Council of Churches, which puts us in touch with virtually all the mainline churches in the country that are of a more progressive ilk. For better or worse, it does not include such organizations as fundamentalist churches. It does include the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Orthodox communions in general. I've gotten to know the leaders of all these churches, and, to some degree, I tend to concentrate more on the Episcopalians and the Lutherans, because I feel the closest to them. They feel like the kind of churches that I feel we're trying to become.

I also spend a lot of time with Black churches, because I feel that they are jewels and repositories of a really phenomenal, basic faith. The way that they give expression to their faith is just so attractive, and I want to be close to them!

The same is true with the Orthodox: They have this really ancient understanding of the faith that augments our experience. That's very important.

It's important to have these ecumenical relations because we can rely on these folks as our sisters and brothers, and I can call them up when we have issues. I can ask them, "Do you have a policy on this?" Or "how

do you all look at this?" It's helpful to speak with others who have more than 200 years of tradition and experience handling these things!

The more that they share their experience, the better we become friends. The more they're willing to share, the more I learn—and the better we become as churches!

I also feel strongly about reaching out to Independent Catholic groups. We do this at the level of bishops, not because we think bishops are more important than others, but precisely because bishops have been the ones that more often screw up the ability to come together in unity! I'm not trying to be cute. Historically, there have been several attempts to bring Independent Catholics together, and it's almost always the bishops, the leaders of the organization, who start fighting with each other and, instead of coming together, they end up being more separated than they were before. So I've been working with a group of bishops, and we're trying to see what can we do to get over that history of fighting each other and being like a couple of stallions up on our back legs! What would it look like if we found a way to listen to each other, learn from each other, and find ways to cooperate with each other? We hosted our first gathering in 2019, and we continue to mature. That's another ecumenical endeavor that is really important.

We've worked hard at bottom-up ecumenism. We're too poor to do top-down ecumenism. When most churches unite in full communion, it takes tens of thousands of dollars to work through 500-year-old issues. You need a big budget to have your top theologians work out 500-year-old issues in hotel meeting rooms, with dinner and rental cars. You bring together university professors who need to be compensated, and the ticker is going the whole time. We don't have the tens of thousands of dollars for that, so we simply get closer to each other at the local level, which may be a better way to go about ecumenism anyway.

Imagine if we had two local parishes in Webster Groves, Missouri that didn't know each other, had no interest in getting to know each other, and would probably never do anything together. They might dutifully come together because somebody told them they should, but then they would question why they're doing it.

We lucked out in Colorado, where three of our parishes have really good relations with their host churches, who are Lutheran, and they enjoy working with those congregations! In one case, Episcopalians share space with the Lutherans as well. These opportunities open doors for us to create local-level relations with the Lutheran Church and Episcopal Church! We worked with the national and diocesan offices of the Lutheran Church and came up with an agreement that can now be a

template for any of our connections with Lutherans around the country. And now we're in the middle of doing the same thing with the Episcopal Church, so that, once we get this agreement in place, we will be able to show this to any local ECC parish that wants to relate to an Episcopal parish. We'll be able to say to any Episcopalian congregation, "We worked it out in Colorado. Perhaps your local bishops would be willing to consider this, too!" These are very important joint opportunities for ministry, worship and learning. There's nothing like working together and learning other Christians who are on fire with the same kind of faith! These are examples of how ecumenism makes a difference!



**Reflections on  
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Quintana: Bishop Frank, can you outline the work that we did in the Rocky Mountain Synod with the Lutherans?

Krebs: I'll share the human element of that story. We had a parish in Colorado where Lutherans and Catholics were together and really wanted to celebrate their unity with each other. They invited me to celebrate the Eucharist with them and to meet with them. As I flew there, I read the document that the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. worked out with the ELCA. It summarized what was learned from all the dialogues between Catholics and Lutherans over the last 30 or 40 years. I was excited by how far the discussion had come! Michael Nicosia, my vicar in Colorado, had invited the local Lutheran bishop over for dinner, so I could meet with him, and I told him of the document that I had just read. I said, "If Roman Catholics can get that close to you, we could get even closer—because a lot of their issues are not our issues. We don't have those issues! There's a very thin veil between where we are and where you all are, and I would like to find a way to explore this some more." At that time, we had four parishes that nested in Lutheran churches. We just decided to do it, and we proposed a very simple, one-page agreement statement, and we ran it by the national ELCA office—because they didn't want to be embarrassed by whatever we were doing at the local level. They wanted to see what we were doing, and I'm really grateful for that: Not only were they not embarrassed; they even promoted our relationship. After that, we brought all our groups together, with pastors and lay representatives, in the Lutheran bishop's office, and we had an all-day dialogue together. The ELCA ecumenical officer joined us through Zoom. We prayed together. We discerned together. In the end, each parish voted on whether to enter into this agreement, [Lutheran] Bishop Jim Gonia and I signed it, and it's an awesome template. And now we have a document that we can share around the country on how the ECC, as a

church, wants to relate to the Lutheran Church through friendship.

Quintana: Can you outline some of the details of that agreement?

Krebs: Absolutely. We looked at all the areas where there is already common agreement, in terms of worship. So, we know that nobody has a problem if an ECC priest goes to a Lutheran board supper or preaches at a Lutheran service, or vice versa; everybody accepts and allows that. We don't consider it a big deal if a lay person in one congregation participates as a Eucharistic minister in another congregation. We don't have any rules against that. There is only one thing that we do not allow yet on an ecclesial level. Because we have not entered into full communion, we have no equal exchange of ministers: That's the last "capstone" of full communion. Receiving communion from each other is not a problem. The only issue is whether a Lutheran pastor can preside at a Catholic mass, or vice versa. We'll need to journey together before we arrive at that capstone. The only exception to the above guidelines is when there is a genuine pastoral need, and the local bishop from each church agrees with each other. So, if a local pastor will be out of town because of a death in the family, and if the congregation wants a priest or minister from the other denomination to come and celebrate the Eucharist for their congregation, they would consult their bishops, and, if the bishops were okay with it, they could do it. I don't know how this sounds to some of you. It may sound very legalistic. We're simply putting out there that this may be allowed in certain circumstances before we're in full communion with one another. It "cracks open the door" and allows us to creatively move forward. No one has had a problem with it so far, which is why we signed this agreement with one another.

Quintana: This was actually a corrective because, even without having an intercommunion agreement, we, at St. Oscar Romero's, had an instance or two where we concelebrated. For instance, when St. Oscar Romero was canonized by the Roman Church, we had a big celebration, and the Lutheran pastor concelebrated with me. That really made some Lutherans unhappy. This agreement provided a corrective and acknowledged that we wouldn't do that again.

Krebs: I appreciate that story, which illustrates that, just because we might be okay with something doesn't mean that the other group is okay with it. It's nice to have agreements at the denominational level.

Mathias: Bishop Francis, many of us are familiar with the National Council of Churches, of which you spoke. Your website mentions the Church World Service. Can you tell us about that?

Krebs: The National Council of Churches used to include the Church World Service within its immediate purview, and now they've spun it off for financial reasons. You might consider them sister organizations. For those from a Roman Catholic background, the Church World Service is the equivalent of Catholic Relief Services. If there's a tornado, flood or war, the Church World Service helps to get aid to people. If you want to help the people in Ukraine, for instance, you can do so through the Church World Service. It gives our local congregations a sense that they don't have to "reinvent the wheel" every time they want to generously respond to a global catastrophe.

L. Walker: Have you created a similar agreement with Episcopalians?

Krebs: In 2013, I went over to the summer school in Old Catholic theology in Utrecht, and I was just amazed. The resources that we received during that experience confirmed many things for us: why we elect our bishops, why it's important to have lay and clergy voice in the governance of the church, and why communion is so important. I also found that Utrecht is not especially interested in meeting with those of us who claim any kind of direct historical connection with Utrecht. They're not interested in working closely with us, because they feel like they tried that before, and it didn't work. They said, "If you're interested in getting close to us, we encourage you to get close to our sister church, which is the Episcopal Church, because we're in full communion with the Episcopal Church." I took that to heart. At a National Council of Churches retreat, I was sitting across the table at lunch from Katharine Jefferts Schori, the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church at the time, and I said, "Bishop Katherine, we're really small, and you're really big, but I would like nothing more than to have much better

relationship with you. We take unity very seriously, and we know that unity takes a long time, but, if there's anything we can do to move in the direction of unity, that would be great! We are certainly willing to explore that with you." After that retreat, I followed up with a written communication to her, and she put me in touch with a number of people, including her ecumenical officer, Reverend Margaret Rose, and Bishop Mike Klusmeyer, who is the point person between the Episcopal Church and Utrecht. I've been working very closely with those two for the last seven or eight years, and I have a really close relationship with both of them. They attend our Catholic Bishops Forum, the group I mentioned, that brings together bishops, because they have an interest in seeing Independent Catholics come closer together. They're always present when we meet, and it has been awesome. Our relationship with the Episcopal Church is mainly through them, and I have a close personal relationship with them that I use all the time: If someone wants to have a connection with their local Episcopal bishop, I can call Mike Klusmeyer and say, "Would you please ask that bishop if he or she would be willing to talk to me?" And he always says "yes" and provides the introduction, giving the bishop the sense that I can be trusted and that I haven't just fallen off the back of a pickup. That has worked out really well. In fact, we wanted to join the State Council of Churches in one state, and, due to a bad experience with some Independent Catholics, the Episcopal bishop in that state wanted no part of the ECC joining. I called Margaret Rose and Mike Klusmeyer, they spoke with him, and he was willing to abstain – if he had voted no, we wouldn't have been able to join. There's nothing like relationships in the ecumenical world! I have another example of how the Episcopal Church has benefited the Catholic Bishops Forum. We were talking about the education for ministry that bishops ought to receive, and we knew that the Episcopal Church has a pretty well developed "college" for bishops. I asked Mike, and he put me in touch with the person who runs it, so that we could learn more about it. Their brilliant director came to our Catholic Bishops Forum and shared a presentation on their program for training bishops in the Episcopal Church, and we're able to learn from their decades of experience with that program. It was invaluable. She told us things that there's no

way we could have known. She told us, for instance, that the Episcopal Church has data suggesting that their bishops experience burnout after five years, so they started putting in place mechanisms to prevent this, like mentors, support groups and sabbaticals. So, we learn from the Episcopal Church, and they report back to Utrecht – and then Utrecht knows what we’re doing and that we’re not trying to be Old Catholic. Locally, one of our parishes is thinking of moving in with an Episcopal parish, so that, too, is a very exciting opportunity.

L. Walker: My congregation was invited by the local Episcopal pastor to worship in their space, and we’ve been there since 2007. They have a new pastor now, but the former pastor and I would concelebrate, especially during Holy Week, and the local bishop ignored what we did on a local basis. With the new pastor, I don’t go near the altar or extend my hands during the consecration, as I did before. They did change the church sign in front of the building, to show our parish’s name in the same color and font size as theirs, which reflects the strong connection between our two communities. Working together, our two communities have been the primary source for ecumenical interfaith relations in Kingman. The former Episcopal pastor and I joined up with the Lutheran pastor, and then we brought in the Methodist minister. We invited the imam from the mosque, and a woman rabbi from Flagstaff would make the trip. I also invited the local LDS president. We’ve sponsored forums that bring people together, to show them that we can be friends and that we can speak on theological issues. We had a forum on original sin, and the response from the people of the town was phenomenal. We’ve been helping to change our community beyond our church walls!

Krebs: That’s a really good witness. Leonard. I really appreciate you echoing that truth back to us! I belong to a clergy alliance in our community, and we say, “We have to get to know each other, because we don’t know when the next mass shooting or earthquake is going to happen, when we’ll need each other but won’t even know each other’s names.”

Frame: What advice or insight do you have for us as we try to get a larger representation of Independent Catholics in other ecumenical groups?

Krebs: Depending on your time and resources, I encourage Independent Catholic churches to “poke up” here or there. There are some really effective groups out there, groups that are connecting people.

Frame: Rather than belong to all these ecumenical groups and work with other churches, is it perhaps better for us to consider our own paraministry that might allow us to share our own voice?

Krebs: With your work in creation and justice, Melina, you might envision a group that pulls together people to address some of those issues—the Independent Catholic Group for Creation Justice, for example. I think that’s a great idea! Like any of these groups, I find that people get burned out when they’re trying to get everyone else interested in their thing. Rather than work to drag people out of their comfort zones, pull together a group of people who join because they’re interested in the issue. We could do a lot of great work!

Ellis: I’m with CACINA, the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, and, now that we have a new presiding bishop, some national responsibilities have devolved on me. I believe there was a time when CACINA may have been in communion with the good folks of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. I’d be happy to speak with you outside of this gathering.

Krebs: Perfect. We have a representative of CACINA in the Catholic Bishops Forum. I’ll look forward to speaking with your new presiding bishop, too! Let’s all metaphorically walk with each other and get to know and trust one another without any commitments. After we build relationships, then we’ll be ready to make deeper commitments with one another!

**In or Out?  
Reform From “Within” by  
the Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests**

Rev. Annie Cass Watson

Rev. Diane Dougherty

Rev. Kathryn Shea

Mathias: We’re excited to have with us three of our sisters from Roman Catholic Womenpriests! While we might see them as closely aligned with us and with our movement as Independent or Inclusive Catholics, our sisters of Roman Catholic Womenpriests have traditionally seen themselves as attempting to bring about the reform of the Roman Church from *within*. Most of us in this movement don’t self-identify as Roman Catholic, and most of us don’t expect that Rome will recognize us any day soon. It might be imagined that the Roman Church similarly treats our sisters as “outsiders,” marginalizing them and not acknowledging their great gifts or the many ways in which they have been called to serve God’s people through the ordained ministries of the Catholic Church. In a special way, we thank Mother Annie Cass Watson of St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, for bringing together this conversation. Many of us remember Mother Annie from our interjurisdictional gathering in Las Vegas, where Mother Annie shared a very moving testimonial as part of our series titled “The 21<sup>st</sup>-century Phoebe Experience.” Welcome, Mother Annie!

Watson: Thank you. This evening, we have with us two women priests, Diane Dougherty and Kathryn Shea. We’ll invite them to start off by telling us what it means to them to be priests. Diane will then share the history of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Kathryn will speak about how we are governed, and I will finish with our vision.

Dougherty: My name is Reverend Diane Dougherty, and I’m in Atlanta, Georgia. I’m very privileged to have been asked to do this. Let me begin by telling you a bit about my priesthood. You’ll notice that our stories are like a kaleidoscope of different experiences that form a beautiful picture! I’ve been

a priest for ten years, and I ask, “What is the priesthood for? Is it for building a kingdom in a church? Or is it for building a kingdom of people of the gospel?” I realize how being a Catholic can be traumatizing. For a long time, I have been seeking a corrective lens, asking that the pathway might be revealed to me. As women priests, we are not well-received within the tradition, so we need to find our own paths. My priesthood has been like a stained-glass window, an experience of finding brokenness in the lives of those we touch and whose lives touch us, and offering them a sacrament of friendship, service and reconciliation—not in a church, but at their tables and at their invitation. The Good News has been translated not in a church setting, but in a dining hall, under a bridge, in a hospital room, or in a coffee shop. Our service is very diverse, more diverse than I could ever have dreamed. We help people get birth certificates, so that they can buy food stamps. We line up notaries to sign wills before death. We testify in court about abuse. After verdicts are given, we visit jails and prisons. I never expected all this as part of my priestly work! The Kingdom calls me forth, toward people, seeking and finding Good News as I listen to and participate in their broken stories, and in their accomplishments, sorrows and hopes. I want my church to grow outside of boundaries that now exist and that keep so many people from each other. Asking Catholics to be inclusive is quite a challenge, and my example seems foreign and strange to them. Regardless, I forge my path to inclusivity, seeking out the next generation, asking how they “do” the gospel, and illuminating the path of Good News. Let me tell you about one of those leaders. My friend, Pam, is a strong gospel woman. She struggles at home: Her husband has ALS, her son is autistic, and her daughter, who now has a “surprise child,” is trying to work and go to school. Her ex-husband is hospitalized after his partner and roommate died in a crash. He broke his spine, both arms and legs, and ribs. My role with Pam is to be present, to carry part of her burden, to be present when they told her ex-husband that his partner had died. My role as a priest was to anoint his broken body and to anoint their shattered minds, to wait with them for healing and a return to the fullness of life. As a priest, I witnessed the welcome of their new child, and I brought them together in love for the



baptism. When the child's mother met the love of her life, I officiated at their wedding. My priesthood is Good News in the minds and hearts of those who seek me out – gay, trans, straight, rich, poor – those who ask me to preside at their weakest and most joyful moments: weddings, baptisms, funerals, healing, using the gift of priesthood to assist them in finding the path of purpose for their life. It has also been a challenge to stand up to the power of supremacy in multiple forms, as it works to divide all the communities of color where I live, as well as to those who assume we will be able to reconstruct the boundaries that hold women hostage and silent. Not on my watch! This is my “priesthood without boundaries,” reconfigured in every age by women working out their life's purposes as they hold close the gospel. To be sure, we are Good News, and in our day we can finally name this as priestly work! We can be ordained. We can claim our authority. The intimate presence of God in our lives has called us, and we said “yes”!

Shea: I am Reverend Kathryn Shea, and I live in hot, humid, sunny Sarasota, Florida. First and foremost, I am a woman. I am a daughter. I am a wife. I am a mom. I am a grandma. We are also adoptive parents to a 33-year-old son affected by fetal alcohol syndrome. I'm a licensed clinical social worker, and I have spent most of my life working with vulnerable children, particularly those in poverty or with behavioral and mental health challenges. I spent a lot of time in Albany, upstate New York, where we lived for 20 years. I've been arrested over 42 times – I lost track after that – and I've been in jail four times. I've been tempted to write a journal of back roads and county jails, but it wouldn't be a bestseller. It was a very natural transition for me, as a peace and justice social worker, to make the path toward woman priesthood. I was born and raised a very strong Roman Catholic. I had a matriarchal grandmother who was Irish Catholic and who went to Mass every day. That's how we were raised. As a very young girl, I told my grandma one day after mass, “I am never going to say, ‘I am not worthy to receive you’ at communion!” She said, “Oh, you can't do that, honey.” And I said, “I just did, Grammy!” She was a rebellious Irish woman, and she should have

known that I had her spirit all along! I knew in my heart that I had to follow my faith. I knew that I had to go to church and say all those prayers, but deep in my heart, I knew that wasn't right. When I was ten, I asked to be an altar boy. They said, "There's a problem. There are two words there: 'altar' 'boy.'" Because I wasn't able to be an altar boy, I often dressed in a cloak and pretended to be the Virgin Mary. After moving to Sarasota and meeting Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, a dear friend, who walked the path of ordination, kept saying to me, "Kathryn, you need to do this. This is your soul. This is your heart. You need to become a woman priest!" That was seven years ago, and I remember saying to her, "I can't do this. I'm not holy enough—and I still say the F-word!" I was ordained in May 2015, and it has been the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me. My most joyous moment was when my daughter and my eight-year-old granddaughter placed on me during my ordination the stole that was made by a woman priest and special friend in Lexington, Kentucky. For me, being a priest means truly walking in the footsteps of Jesus, and carrying the heart of his beloved mother in my heart. It means seeking the Divine in myself and in other people, even when that becomes incredibly challenging. To be a priest means to work tirelessly to be a true disciple of Christ and to simply do what is required of us, which is to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God! For me, being a priest means putting myself out there, taking personal risks, and speaking and protesting against injustices, even when my legs are shaking. It means being a role model to my children, my grandchildren, and all the children who will come after us. Each of us possesses God-given gifts to bring God's kingdom to this earth, if only we have the ears to hear it, the eyes to see it, and the hearts to make it happen. To me, that's what it means to be a priest!

Watson: I have talked about my story before. It's actually printed in *Our Better Version of Catholicism*. To me, being a priest means that I've answered my call. A priest is always a disciple, and to be a disciple means to be called, as the first companions of Jesus were called, and to have a vocation, as Jesus did. To me, being a priest means being an apostle, like the original apostles who were sent to serve others. The key word is

service. Saint Paul says, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for you" (1Cor. 12:15). What does a priest always carry to others? We carry the message and the presence of Jesus! We come with word and work, with sacrifice and sacraments, with prayer and suffering. For me, I represent what the Roman Catholic Church should look like today. I preside at the Eucharist. I share the Bread of Life and the Cup of the New Covenant with all who are hungry, no matter who they are. This is the heart of my ministry as a woman priest!

Dougherty: Thank you, Kathryn and Annie. I'll now share the history of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. Women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church began in 2002 when seven brave women responded to their call and were consecrated by two rebel Roman Catholic bishops who decided that it was time for women, who are needed in the Church, to be brought to the sacrament. Of the seven, Dagmar Celeste was the only one who spoke fluent English. The former first lady of Ohio, Dagmar is very spiritual woman. She is very well read and has promoted and supported the women's ordination movement for years. She initially declined the invitation to be consecrated, but others insisted, noting that America has the most women who are prepared for ordination of any country on Earth. The large number of women in U.S. seminarians even concerned the Vatican, which worried that women might ask for ordination! After that consecration, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and Gisela Forster ordained Patricia Fresen, a South African Dominican nun who taught seminary theology for years and had a deep longing to be ordained a priest. When she returned from her ordination in Germany, where she was on vacation, to South Africa, she was excommunicated by her church and ostracized by her community. It was terrifying for her to move penniless back to Germany, but the community that ordained her rallied to support her during those years. We then had two English-speaking womenpriests! The first three well-prepared women in America were consecrated bishops in 2003 on the St. Lawrence Seaway, international territory not belonging to any Roman Catholic diocese. Those women ordained eight womenpriests, then another eight in Pittsburgh in 2006. The

movement to consecrate American women as bishops continued. In 2009, four women were chosen among those who had been ordained, to be consecrated bishops in the United States. Patricia Fresen came over for it. There was a real learning curve for everybody involved, as we began to train and ask how we would meet the needs of those asking to be ordained. Multiple people were ready to be ordained, but we realized early on that we needed to establish qualifications. Those qualifications evolved from 2002 to 2010. We largely followed the ordination qualifications for male priests, but we also wanted a communal component: We wanted to ordain women who were embedded in faith communities. We were not welcomed in churches, so we had to start our own communities of faith. Every candidate for ordination had to have the equivalent of a master's degree in theology or ministry, and had to undergo a background check and a psychological evaluation. Today we have the People's Catholic Seminary, which was started by Bridget Mary Meehan and Mary Theresa Streck. And you can go online and find that formation program. Accountability is important, so we also have a mentoring process for at least a year or two before ordination. In this way, candidates can get to know us, and we can get to know them. We prefer to ordain women who participate in their own communities of faith or general assemblies, and who are recommended to us by the members of our community. There are no qualifiers for ordination: We ordain people of strong character and theological background regardless of whether they are separated, divorced, remarried, gay, or trans men or women. We have two branches in the American movement: the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP), which was started in 2002, and the Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests (ARCWP), which broke off in 2010. We have collective and individual ministries in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Central and South America, South Africa, Philippines and Taiwan. We currently have 240 to 280 seminarians, deacons and priests worldwide. The Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests is nonhierarchical. We share power, and with shared power comes responsibility. Our bishops don't sit at the top of the decision-making table. Their responsibility is to partner with those who guide candidates and to assist in the

planning of ordinations. We have a partner, the Federation of Christian Ministry, which commissions our clergy so that we can function in any state of the nation without the approval of a Roman Catholic diocese. The ARCWP is governed by a board of directors, who pool the opinions of all and make the final decisions. Because our governance is nonhierarchical, our board carries out the decisions made by the group. Our process is extremely messy. It is loud. It is long, but we always work toward consensus. We have also allowed men to join us. We're not afraid of being sued as an organization, and we use the name of our organization when we challenge the Roman Catholic Church to change its discriminatory practices. Our movement pushes us out into the margins.

Shea: I'll speak about our governance structure. Governance is critically important. The Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests is an international community within the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement. As a community of equal disciples, our calling is first and foremost to follow Jesus the Christ, our model of liberation, and to grow in unity with all in the heart of God. We are deeply aware of our deep connectedness to one another, to our earth and our universe, and to the community of all creation. Our mission is to live gospel justice and inclusiveness by ordaining men and women as equals and as partners in the Roman Catholic Church. As we often say, we are not leaving the Roman Catholic Church; we are *leading* the Roman Catholic Church in the direction in which we think Jesus would intend it to be. All bishops, priests and deacons are ordained in apostolic succession, and we follow the Roman Catholic rite of ordination. The ARCWP is an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with the federal government, and those who are ordained can choose whether or not to serve on the board of directors. We do not have an elected board of directors; it is a volunteer position open to all who are ordained. There is an executive committee made up of a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer; the treasurer serves as the chair of the Finance Committee. Our bylaws were affirmed in October 2016 and revised in 2017 to include terms of office. As Diane said, our decision making is through a model of consensus.

If you want to see something messy, just come to one of our meetings! Consensus takes more time, but I love watching us talk it out until all at the table agree on what we're going to say. We use procedures and techniques that maximize agreement and help us to arrive at final decisions. Our vision statement reads: "The Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests is committed to a renewed model of ordained ministry and an inclusive community of equals in the Roman Catholic Church." Our mission reads: "The Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, therefore, responds to this call from the Holy Spirit in our time by preparing, ordaining and supporting qualified women and men from all states of life, who are committed to a model of Church grounded in Jesus' vision of an Open Table where all are welcome. By our living and ministering within a community of equals, we are respectful of differences among people. In the tradition of our mystics and our prophets, we challenge the dominance of patriarchal systems by promoting practices of equality that leads us to recognize and stand for justice on behalf of all people, locally and globally, and on behalf of the urgent needs of ecojustice for our planet." Our values are equality, justice, accountability, congeniality, prophetic obedience, spirituality and compassion. Each of those values is defined in our handbook, the equivalent of our "operating manual." The ARCWP operates under a set of ten very specific guidelines that have all been developed and affirmed by the community. These guidelines contain the process for addressing issues and needs that arise within the organization. Our process is pretty simple: People fill out and submit to their Circle leader a form that states the issue. Most recently, our biggest issue, which has not yet been thoroughly resolved, is whether or not to keep the word "Roman" in our title. Because there are many people on both sides of the issue, it might be years before that ever gets totally sorted out! Someone in our community submitted that on the issue form, we held a forum where all community members are welcomed. This is not a decision-making forum. It's an opportunity for all to speak and be recorded. Their words are shared with all, so that we can really work through the issue. We have two specific committees in the ARCWP: our Constitution Committee

and our Finance Committee. We also have a number of Circles, support groups, teams and non-ordained volunteers who assist our ministry. As we say, there is room at the table for everyone! A Circle can be formed by any team that says, "We want to create and support a new Circle! This is our purpose, these are our members, and these are our facilitators." We hold elections every two years for executive committee members, and we have a succession plan, to help prepare people to take these critical leadership positions within the organization. We also have a Circle Leader Team, which consists of the Circle Leader, the Circle Leader Advisor (who is the past Circle Leader), and the Circle Leader Incumbent. The Circle Leader Team fields issues or concerns that come up within our community, and facilitates a process of resolution or direction for those issues. We have a similar Program Coordinator Team, with a Program Coordinator, a Program Coordinator Advisor, and an Incumbent Program Coordinator. Our Program Coordinators are the facilitators who field and vet candidates for ordination and other support members. They walk with them through ten units in the People's Catholic Seminary. Our Support Staff is also affirmed by our membership via an election. That's 76 pages of our handbook distilled in about 15 minutes!

Dougherty: As Kathryn spoke, I was struck by how the ARCWP is an evolving experiment, not fixed in stone, but allowing us the freedom to move and change. It's kind of like a fluid. It's fluid, especially for those of us who come from denominations and ministries that had firm, cemented boundaries.

Watson: I'll speak to the future. What will we continue to do, now and into the future for our movement within the Roman Catholic Church? We will continue to promote a church of inclusion. We will continue to challenge the Roman Catholic Church's gender inequality. We will continue to have communities where all are welcome and all can receive sacraments, especially those whom the Vatican marginalizes. 33 million Catholics have left the Roman Catholic Church because they have been abandoned by the institution. Through our movement, we hope to show them what an inclusive community is like. We continue to reject

excommunication. No punishment can separate us from Christ or cancel out our baptism, and no church authority can separate us from God. We always say, "This is *our* church, and we are not leaving it!" We will continue to promote and empower women. Women should never be treated as second-class citizens. This violates God's will. We will continue to promote ourselves within the Church as having valid orders. Our first bishops, as you heard, were consecrated by male bishops in apostolic succession. We will continue to voice ourselves to Pope Francis, with the hope that he will chart a new path forward toward equality in our church, by opening all ministries to women. We also strongly believe in the primacy of conscience. We must continue to remind our Church that Jesus—though he didn't ordain anyone—did, in fact, call men *and* women. We will continue to be visible reminders that women are equal images of God. Together, we are healing centuries of misogyny. We will continue to remind the hierarchy that they should follow Jesus' example of gospel equality and the early Church's tradition of women in liturgical leadership as deacons, priests and bishops. This is what our movement is about, and this is what we will continue to do into the future!



**Reflections on “In or Out? Reform From ‘Within’ by  
the Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests”**

Mathias: There’s an interesting dynamic with respect to your relationship with us in this movement and with respect to your relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. It seems, for instance, that the Roman Catholic Church may not view you as being in full communion with them, and yet, when we look at you, we see sisters in ministry and folks with whom we have much in common! Can you shed some light on what you see in us and what you see in the Roman Catholic Church? That is, do you see yourselves as being in communion with us and/or with the Roman Catholic Church? How do you perceive your relationships outside of the ARCWP?

Shea: I see us as being in communion with everyone. The Vatican is not our enemy. We are sad for them, that they do not accept us. They’re stagnant and haven’t evolved for thousands of years. We’re moving, with or without them, and we hold them in our hearts—just like we hold all of you in our hearts. We are on this journey together. We’re all companions on the journey!

J. Walker: You are such a wonderful inspiration. I am a woman priest in the Independent movement through the Ascension Alliance, and I’m pastor of the Cosmic Christ Sophia Community, formerly the Church of Antioch at Santa Fe. One of the challenges I encounter is with the masculine language of the canonical scriptures. How have you handled this challenge with respect to scripture and liturgy?

Watson: We are encouraged to write our liturgies, and we spend a lot of time creating the liturgy in inclusive ways. It’s a very important task to take and recreate the liturgy with inclusive language for all, so that no one is singled out or left behind. I’ve spent at least a year and a half writing liturgies for different feast days, and we all use each other’s liturgies. This helps to define who we are.

Dougherty: There was an effort early on to collect these liturgies. Bridget Mary has some wonderful liturgies, and Shanon Sterringer has a beautiful format for feminist liturgy. We could send that to you – and we would love to have yours! This is less an issue for me here in Georgia, where I don't have a Catholic community near me. Many former Roman Catholics have fled the radical right wing and now find themselves in alternative, non-liturgical but very spiritual experiences of church. They don't do ritual, but they are inclusive! I wonder: Are the people in your community open to inclusive language? Can you use the word "Sophia," or is that strange to them?

J. Walker: It's a process. We're living into it and feeling all of the different ramifications. In all our services, when we say the Hail Mary, we remind folks that we are also honoring the Divine Feminine. In several services over the years, we have focused more specifically on the Divine Feminine. I wrote a newsletter article a few months ago about how reflecting on and using language of the Divine Feminine can enhance our experience of the Godhead and the Divine Presence. I find that many people are excited to hear of the Divine Feminine. Our community is fairly open theologically and spiritually, so it's been a good experience.

Brohl: I very much appreciate what each of you has said. I'm supportive of the notion of an Independent Roman Catholic Church. Your movement was founded on the notion of making a statement to the Roman Catholic Church. Apparently, there's now some consideration being given to dropping "Roman" from your self-identification. Is there something you might say about that without necessarily declaring your position?

Dougherty: One side of the argument says that when we maintain our Roman Catholic identity, we stand at the altar as a counter-narrative, and we force people to rethink their position on who the Roman Catholic Church is. The counter-argument is that Rome will never change. They are old men with old thoughts. Seminaries sucked them in as young kids, leading them to believe that, once ordained, they are next to God and that they deserve all the trappings of the throne for life. We don't need to participate in that narrative.

Robison: I may be the only person here who has never been a part of a church that doesn't ordain women. My grandmother was one of the first women to be ordained a ruling elder and the president of her church. I grew up with women pastors, and I've never not known women clergy. When we attended one of my cousin's [Roman Catholic] First Communions, I asked my mom, "Why are there no ladies up front?" I discovered rather quickly that that was not a welcomed question. You three are rockstars to me!

Furr: I was a Sister for almost 30 years, so it was nice to hear your language on governance again. I have followed your movement since that Dominican Sister was ordained. We were so excited by that, and we wondered what would happen as a result. It's amazing to see where the Holy Spirit has brought your movement during these last several years. You are inspiring, and this is what Church is about!

Božek: Like Dr. Mattijs Ploeger, I believe it's a heresy not to ordain women. Please convey my gratitude to the ARCWP for sharing Mother Annie with St. Stanislaus in St. Louis for almost seven years. We are blessed by the presence and ministry of Mother Annie and Deacon Donna at the altar every Sunday. It's a beautiful witness, and it enriches our parish. St. Stanislaus was a Roman Catholic parish for 120 years until we, like you, were excommunicated. Having two women fully vested, preaching and celebrating with us, makes us a healthier Catholic parish. I use and recommend Bridget Mary's book with eucharistic prayers that she wrote for different seasons. Tell us about the reality of your two organizations. Eight years after the foundational event of the consecration of the "Danube Seven," you split from your mother organization, your founding group. Sadly, this seems indicative of our American reality and the Independent Catholic movement. After only eight years, this new and vibrant ecclesial community experienced a major split – and this happens with every single jurisdiction I have encountered in the 17 years since my excommunication. Are we, as American Catholics, condemned to eternal splits in our movement? Is there something within our American psyche that causes us to start new movements every time we disagree? If you are okay with messiness now, why couldn't you be okay with

messiness within the RCWP? Why was there no room in the RCWP to work through the process, rather than take your toys and go to a different playground?

Shea: If I had that answer, I could write a book and be really wealthy! It seems that this is something that we've seen since the beginning of America, and something that we're seeing in the political sphere today. Why can't we get our act together? Why can't we just come together as one? I used to see breaking up as messy, sad and horrible. I don't anymore. I now see reconstruction in the midst of deconstruction. Sometimes you have to break down in order to rebuild. In July, we gathered in Fort Myers to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RCWP. There was a coming together of members of the RCWP and the ARCWP. Our history doesn't make me sad. Evolution is messy, and I'm hopeful!

Dougherty: All of us were brought up under the influence of multiple forms of domination and supremacy, including male domination. Processes that lead to consensus go contrary to this. Women are oppressed, but we know that men are more oppressed, because they have to put on patriarchal "pants" every day they wake up. They don't get to "climb down the ladder," like we do, to enjoy our children and our families. They're always on duty, whereas we who are not accepted can turn that off to maintain our mental health. This is especially true of the men in the Roman Catholic Church: Their social and emotional life and their pensions are tied up in the Church! They can't grow within the institution, but they also can't leave it. That's why so many of us remain Roman Catholic: We can't imagine our "branches" separated from the "tree"!

Watson: I feel a mutual respect between our sisters of the RCWP and ARCWP. We are able to put aside whatever differences we had years ago that made us go in different directions. We're all in this for the same reason: that women are called to ordained ministry, just as men are. I received my training from a RCWP bishop. They're a lot different than we are. You might say that they're more traditional, perhaps even sometimes rigid. The respect we have for one another is a beautiful thing. We celebrate each other's milestones. We

accompany one another through sorrow and sadness. We've moved beyond what split us, and now we're all under the RCWP "umbrella"!

Božek: If that is the case, you may be a role model for our movement on how we might come together. If you have overcome your differences in 12 years, you might show us how to overcome our differences!

D'Arrigo: Y'all are my heroes, and I'm just so blown away. I had the opportunity to meet Mother Annie earlier this year, and she instantly blew me away! It seems that many American believers experience being broken apart, then put back together by the Holy Spirit. Your schismatic moment is obviously starting to heal itself over time, which, to me, is evidence of how active the Holy Spirit is in your movement. As Father Marek suggested, that could be a model for other jurisdictions. I can only imagine all the extremely diverse and really inclusive folks who would just adore meeting you in worship!

Quintana: I am thrilled with this presentation tonight. I grew up a "cradle Catholic," and I got in trouble in the fifth grade at my parochial school for drawing graphic novels that included women priests and married priests. The nun thought I was obviously confused about sexuality and gender roles. Blessings to you all for modeling such inclusivity!

J. Walker: We lament splitting with the worldwide Church of Antioch, yet there are some 50,000 Christian denominations! I've always wondered if this is something inherent in the Christ energy, which makes all things new. Some folks aren't comfortable with being open to the Spirit. There's a balance between freedom and structure, and it's love that keeps the family together.

Dougherty: There are also different forms of governance. Raised in a very collaborative family, I've never understood hierarchy. The men did not make the decisions in our family; they tagged along. You can imagine how my experience in religious life was totally different: I worked with men who saw women as commodities, with no voice, no say, no nothing. We were evicted from parishes, sent away when

we opened our mouths. There was tremendous chaos. The Catholic Church decided that it would be very top-down, very hierarchical, making all decisions and eliminating anything decided by others. I decided I could no longer be part of that. I want voice and vote, power and responsibility.

Ellis: Reverend Jenny, I just wanted to underscore your point that there may possibly be something in the Gospel that presides over these splits. Writing on the subversiveness of the gospel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that there is a grain buried deep in the DNA of the gospel that is diametrically opposed to the idea of an institutional Church!

Božek: I don't want to be contrary, but it seems that 90% of the splits in Christianity have occurred here in North America. I return to my question: Is this something indicative of our culture, of our extreme, rugged individualism, that makes it so easy for us to pack up our toys and leave? I agree with Diane: Sometimes we need to protect our own mental, physical and emotional well-being, and that of our family members and those under our care. When I look at this gathering, 90% of us agree on 99% of things, and yet we come from 15 different "jurisdictions" – despite the fact that we agree on almost everything! As a European, I see this as a very American thing. We agree on everything, yet we choose to stay independent rather than come together. I don't understand this American idea that I must have my own structure, my own kingdom, my own church! I find it intriguing and troubling at the same time.

Furr: If it's any consolation, not all of us agree on everything! It seems that Christianity is beginning to come into an empowerment and awareness that we don't need an institutional mediator to understand Jesus' message. He told us that, if we want to pray, we should go into our closet, close the door, and allow the Holy Spirit to be our teacher. All religions – Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam – go through similar turbulence when they institutionalize. We are in a very unique position as Independent Catholics to usher in that divinely-inspired waking-up! I would hate to see it squashed by cheerfully running back to things that are familiar. Let's be the change we want in the world.

That's the gift of Independent Catholicism in the world today!

Kemp: I'd like to respond to my dear friend, Father Marek. I still yearn for reunion between the United States and Great Britain—and I'm wondering why we can't reunite and become one again! Kidding aside, there's something to be said about independence and freedom. The freedom to innovate and try new things is a feature of the Independent movement. Some of our communities are a little more traditional, and others are what Julie Byrne calls "woo woo." That tension is wonderful. I'm really proud of the independence and freedom of our movement, which allows Father Marek to celebrate the *Novus Ordo*, but with some of the innovative prayers written by Bishop Bridget Mary of the ARCWP. Those things can naturally happen in our movement. Personally, I'm not terribly troubled by the "disunity" of our movement. It doesn't bother me. I also understand the drive toward unity, particularly by those who come from Holy Mother Church.

Bożek: We are certainly blessed with flexibility and the freedom to experiment: It's easier to move 25 people than it is to move 65 million people. I was super-impressed with what happened at Lambeth during these past ten days: Many people expected the Worldwide Anglican Communion to implode, as the Methodist Church did two years ago. That division did not happen. Instead, they acknowledged differences while embracing the uniting bond of Anglicanism. They found a way to continue being together! I find that so inspiring and uplifting, and I pray for the day when our movement, too, might experience its own Lambeth miracle—when we might commit to journeying together despite our differences.

Quintana: Perhaps we might take comfort in the model we see in the Scriptures: The churches of Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Galatia probably agreed on 99.9% of things, but they remained autonomous churches.

Mathias: As we conclude our conversation, we recognize that it's up to us to solve our own problems within Independent Catholicism. For those of you who are joining us this evening from the ARCWP, do you have any suggestions for

us as we continue our own journey toward overcoming the vestiges of clericalism and sexism within Independent Catholicism?

Dougherty: We need to learn from the toxic masculinity of the Roman Catholic Church. Men have been taught that they must assume positions—with responsibilities, administration, finances, the care of property, the care of the people—that go against their humanity. They focus on their jobs, and they don't develop the heart. They don't develop socially and emotionally. That opens the door to such things as the priest sex abuse scandal. If we're going to overcome clericalism, we need to begin by retraining our seminarians to understand that they are intimate participants in humanity. God resides within that intimacy, and neither celibacy nor bans on homosexuality nor trans issues should be part of that equation. The tentacles of those institutional beliefs reach into our mind, heart and soul.

Watson: Between the Womenpriest movement and the Independent Catholic movement, we're doing good things!



**“Don’t Call Them Traditionalists”:  
The Appeal to Certain Theologies & Ecclesiologies  
within Independent Catholicism**

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni

If you are a user of social media, you know that it has incredible, constructive uses. Many of us on this webinar today would not have remained connected to each other were it not for social media networks, and many of us in fact met in the virtual world long before we met face-to-face or even Zoom-to-Zoom.

In recent years, an array of groups have cropped up on social networking sites, most notably Facebook, through which laity and clergy of the Independent Sacramental Movement have connected. Some of these connections are very upbeat, and some share prayers, learning opportunities and resources. Sometimes, though, the interactions have been snarky, judgmental and even condemning of each other’s outlook or practice.

In a conversation on Facebook not long ago, regarding the distinction between tradition and traditionalism, there were responses like, “The statement in the [opening post] is a ridiculous conceit, doubtlessly cooked up to justify whatever ridiculous Protestant heresy is floating around in the movement these days” and “Well, damning your soul to a few purgatorial centuries is your business, not mine.” Or “Give it a rest, man” to a colleague, followed by a minor back-and-forth tirade of mutual disdain.

Fortunately, a lot of this stuff is no longer searchable online, thanks to the rigor of page administrators. But those two examples give you a sense of it.

Some of this fractiousness centers on ecclesial practices and ecclesial processes, and it seems to me that one of the standout divides is around liturgical theology and liturgical rubrics. Often, the right/wrong arguments are supported by references to the “tradition,” and who is getting the “tradition” right, as we continue to live into the emergent Catholicism of which we are a part.

I would argue that arguments with references to what is “the tradition” have been going on since the earliest life of the Church; the first five centuries—which included some great diversities in thinking and practice—were in effect a battle over orthodoxy, “right-thinking.” Many of the topics of the first seven councils of the Church, the seven councils that are emphasized by the Union of Utrecht and its members,

and in fact many of our jurisdictions, were focused on weighing in on theological differences, sorting out what is true to the lived experience of the faithful as they have expressed their faith over time, such as whether or not one must be circumcised to be Christian. It doesn't get much earlier than that. Well, of course there is the episode mentioned in the invitation to this session:

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

For they do not wash their hands when they eat.’

Jesus answered them, ‘And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your traditions?

...For the sake of your traditions,

you have made void the word of God.’”

– Matthew 15:2-6

As I mentioned, most of the Churches that trace their lineage to the Old Catholics of Europe honor the outcomes of the first seven ecumenical councils. That would take us to the year 787 A.D. If you take a look at those councils, the primary bickering revolved around theological fractiousness regarding the nature of God, like Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, iconoclasm, etc.

These councils all occurred, of course, prior to the East/West Schism.

Probably the council where the notion of the centrality of tradition in the Catholic experience came in the Catholic Counter Reformation: the Council of Trent. We don't need to recap AP European History in this session to recall the particularly harsh lines drawn between Luther/Zwingli/Calvin on the one hand, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy around the question of Roman Catholic primacy, authority and (if one brackets the Orthodox churches) exclusivity in the Christian world.

Most of us are familiar with Luther's *solas*: *scriptura sola*, *gratia sola*, *fidei sola* (scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone). These principles are not actually found in one place in the Reformation canon, but they do encapsulate the spirit of the way the reformers of Catholicism were challenging the institutional Church, particularly in its abuses of power around sacraments and money.

The Catholic Counter Reformation responded in many ways to the assertion that grace, scripture, and faith stand alone were the route to salvation. The place of scripture had a particular edge, as it elevated the authority of scripture over the tradition and the authority that accrued to the institution, its practices, teachings and leaders. Before the medieval period, there was no need to distinguish or define elements like the tradition, the church, scripture or authority. There was a common

understanding that all of these things participated in the whole that was Christianity – and that whole was the authority of Jesus Christ reflected in creeds, liturgy and more. A famous quote from Vincent of Lerins captures this: “The true teaching of the Church as that which is taught everywhere, always and by everyone.”

This notion eroded in the work of figures like Abelard and Thomas More, who investigated contradictions between scripture and the work of the apostolic fathers. But the Reformation completely shattered the monolith by taking the phrase coined by William of Ockham, *scriptura sola*, and imbuing it with a new authority. For Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, theology existed in obedience to the Word.

To this, the Roman Catholics responded: Yes, the apostolic tradition is handed to us, and we have received accounts written early that pass on the revelation of Christ and the apostles, but not everything was written down, so the balance of this revelation comes to us through the Church. The Spirit was given to the Church, and it is the Spirit that ongoingly reveals. The fourth session of Trent led to a decree that the apostolic tradition, having “been transmitted in some sense from generation to generation, down to our times” were to be accepted “with as much reverence” (*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*) as sacred scripture.

The affirmation of tradition remains central in Roman Catholicism, and is articulated beautifully in the documents of Vatican II. The intimate relationship between tradition and scripture is reaffirmed in the November 1965 Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*. Scripture and tradition “form one sacred deposit of the word of God” (DV 10) and “It is not from sacred scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed” (DV 9). This basically affirmed again that the tradition is critical for unpacking the revealed truth of the scriptures.

This Catholic position, that tradition is authoritative, is reflected in the self-understandings of many of our jurisdictions. I’ll quote here Bishop Peter Elder Hickman, the founding bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, of which I am a part: “To be an Ecumenical Catholic means to affirm the proclamation (*kerygma*) of historic Christianity: the kerygma is to be discovered in the collected writings of the New Testament documents; the kerygma is to be discovered in the tradition of the Church, her liturgy and prayers, her teaching, and her ministerial practice from the earliest times to the present, as well as in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. The kerygma of the Church is the living witness given by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

And even in Roman Catholicism, there are levels of authority within the tradition. You might recall the hierarchy of truths (dogma, doctrine, discipline, etc.).

However, most people think that the “tradition” is what they did, or their parents did, or their grandparents did. For them, tradition is really reduced to familiar habit. This perspective was pointedly critiqued by Jaroslav Pelikan in his five-book series on Christian tradition.

Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are, and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.<sup>1</sup>

So how will we, as we develop as an eclectic community with many perspectives, restrain ourselves from becoming mutual policers of orthodoxy and orthopraxy? How will we bring a Christian humility and openness to our interjurisdictional conversations?

Our colleague, Father Mike Lopez, said yesterday that, for him, Catholic is a way of being Christian, not a reference to an institution. Many of us would sign on to that assertion. Some of us bring a strong Anglican perspective or Orthodox perspective to our way of being Catholic. Some of us, as we saw in our sessions on the mystical corner of our movement, bring both ancient and new understandings of the divine connection found in silence and more.

If we think of ourselves like stars in a constellation, a constellation that I will call emergent Catholicism, then we might think of ourselves as somehow a whole that paints a picture, but distinct in all of our satellite ways of being.

That would, of course, be my perspective as a priest serving a community within a communion of communities. I think it’s also very Pauline, consonant with the metaphor of the body.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*.

<sup>2</sup> 1Cor. 12:21-27 states: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers,

As someone shaped by Roman Catholicism, I'd remind us that even within that system there are levels of Church teaching. It is not dogma that a priest wear a cope and gloves for certain liturgical acts, nor a chasuble or dalmatic. It is not dogma to use the Roman rite to consecrate the Eucharist, although violation of that liturgical law might lead, within that jurisdiction to disciplinary action. Some of us don't believe Jesus stops at the door due to our Eucharistic matter or the rubrics of the Mass, such as where our hands are positioned, or if we have done the proper ablution.

Many of us are quite attached to the provenance of our ordinations through particular bishops and we see legitimacy, particularly legitimacy with Utrecht, in that. I would remind us that the notion of apostolic succession did not spring fully-formed from the side of Jesus Christ, but developed over time and became significant for certain churches, particularly in distinguishing and even elevating themselves after fractures.<sup>3</sup> I recommend to you the book, *Apostolic Succession: An Experiment that Failed* by David W. T. Brattson.

In light of the issues this talk is addressing, which is really interjurisdictional disharmony, I am inclined to wonder: If, in fact, we reject the papal magisterium in both extraordinary and ordinary forms, how is it that we can stand in judgement of each other's practices? If we, in our various jurisdictions, do not have liturgical law *per se*, how is it that we can decide for each other what is valid or invalid, licit or illicit? What are we referencing when we claim something is legitimate or illegitimate?

We might adopt the wonderful suggestions of a Roman Catholic theologian I admire, Francis. J. Sullivan. We might remember that:

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every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

<sup>3</sup> "In the middle or late first century, the church in the City of Rome sent a letter to that at Corinth because malcontents in the latter had deposed clergy ordained by the apostles and/or officeholders who were their designated successors. The letter advocated that those in the succession from the apostles should be restored. First Clement wrote of the apostles: "And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe." *Apostolic Succession: An Experiment that Failed* by David W.T. Brattson.

1. Theology, and all that it informs, including ecclesial structure and liturgical rules and rubrics, is faith seeking understanding. This of course is the widely accepted definition of Anselm of Canterbury, who gave us *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding.
2. Anyone who does theology is hopefully a person who is “committed to seeking a contemporary understanding of their faith.” The recognition of contemporaneity is, *de facto*, a recognition that the Church—the people of God and their structures—has been in a non-static development from the moment of the resurrection to this very day. Christian revelation is in a dynamic relationship with all the developments of the human family, particularly culture and social change and advancement.
3. Catholic theology, in particular—and I still consider myself a Catholic theologian—is done “from within the Catholic tradition.” Theologian David Tracy notes this as he says that the goal of theology is “the reinterpretation of a religious tradition by committed and informed thinkers in that tradition.” I believe every participant in this colloquium of ours is participating in this, in that our goal, per Tracy, is to translate our “understanding... into concepts and terms that will make it more meaningful and intelligible for the Catholic faithful today.”<sup>4</sup> Mudslinging on social media does precisely the opposite.

Yesterday, Bishop Francis of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion pointed to something in a gentle yet important way: Which of these central aspects of the kerygma do we in fact need to attend to, if, in fact, we wish to be siblings to other churches, particularly the longer established churches? Of the many threads that weave the tapestry of the great, messy, inclusive community that names itself Christian, some stand out as particularly important in the self-understandings of many.

I already shared Bishop Peter’s recapitulation of the kerygma. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral named:

1. The holy scriptures, as containing all things necessary to salvation;
2. The creeds (specifically, the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds), as the sufficient statement of Christian faith;
3. The dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion;
4. The historic episcopate, locally adapted.

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<sup>4</sup> Sullivan p 8

At this point, I'd like to note three areas worth our consideration as we address a sort of emergent legalism in our movement.

First, I note how we tend to have these kinds of conversations in isolation from our lay leaders, something that is of concern to me. For example, if apostolic succession is critical to our emergent Catholic sense of unity as clergy, is that also the case for our laity? That issue is in fact a major point of ongoing difference between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Church and the Lutheran Catholic dialog, in part, of course, because of the ordination of women, which is not seen by Roman Catholics as representing authentic apostolic succession. Another neuralgic issue is the acceptance of homosexuality, which, of course, many of us see as one of the central expressions of our identity and a focal point for our sacramental justice. I would urge all of us to think about how we can deconstruct the exclusion of laity from so many of our conversations. We cannot reflect on the faith of our churches, our ecclesial reality, in their absence.

Second, we need to articulate and express aloud when we engage with each other the particularities from which our viewpoints arise. I am trained in the history of the Church, but the theological lens of my academic life has been Catholic, specifically Roman Catholic. One of the things I embraced deeply in the final chapter of my studies was the idea that all of us look through windows shaped by our life experience, social location, including cultural background and economic strata, and more. One of the things I would encourage all of us to do as an exercise is own the place from which we look, particularly if we are committed to social and systemic change, as so many of us in the movement are. This critical analysis of where we look from brings humility and also opportunities for solidarity and openings for action.

Third, we have to ask ourselves: What are the pastoral implications of mutual disdain and critique? I'd like to offer the thinking of Dr. Gunter Esser, Director of Old Catholic Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany, for your consideration, which I encountered thanks to my friend, Bishop David Strong of the Apostolic Catholic Church in America. Dr. Esser presented a lecture titled "To Life: The Old Catholic Way of Church" at the second national assembly of the Old Catholic Church, Province of the United States (TOCCUSA) in 2011. Dr. Esser notes:

Again, looking on the religious situation of my country, especially in the eastern part, I must say: You cannot come with high theology, you cannot come with the creeds, and you cannot come with all the decisions the Church has made during its 2,000

years of Church history. You cannot come with all the differences between the denominations.

People without this special Christian or Church background are really not interested in all these clashes. They don't understand, for example, why one church doesn't allow members from another church to participate in the Eucharist. They don't understand why church leaders must only be men, why divorced women and men who marry again are not allowed to be full members of their congregation, why gay or lesbian people who try to live their faith and live in a partnership are called sinners. People there don't understand. And I must confess, sometimes I am feeling really disgusted seeing all these theological or legal clashes which obscure God's Good News of freedom and life.

And I ask myself in silent moments, coming back from one of those fights: Is this truly the center of the message we are called to proclaim? Deep in my heart I am feeling a huge shame, because I had to realize again that we had changed this center of our message and have replaced it with questions of structure and law.

Please understand me correctly: You need structure, you need regulation and church law to build a church and to plant parishes, but all these things which are necessary to do, should not obscure what is the fundamental of our vocation, the foundation of our mission, and our proclamation of the Gospel. Structures and law can mutate to idols, if we are not careful.

That was one of the deepest understandings I had to make: that people in this secular context of life, without God, without connection to the Church are not interested in this jungle of Church law and regulation. They come, if they ever come, and ask: Can you help me to live? Can you help me to find light in all my darkness? How can I feel free from all these terrible chains of bondage, which make me a slave? How can I live a real human life?

Maybe, most of the people who come, knocking at our doors don't ask using these words, but when they tell us their stories, we see that their life is like this: captured, hopeless, bleak, and they are suffering, and they want to have hope and light and a kind of future. These are the real questions we have to answer! This is the missionary path we have to follow!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *To Life: The Old Catholic Way of Church* by Rev Prof Gunter Esser access via Scribd <https://www.scribd.com/document/485743399/to-life-the-old-catholic-way-of-church-by-rev-prof-gunter-esser> 8 10 2022



**Reflections on  
 “Don’t Call Them Traditionalists”:  
 The Appeal to Certain Theologies & Ecclesiologies  
 within Independent Catholicism**

Leary: Trish, I appreciate your words. The last two weeks have been hell on earth because I lost my mother, and I had to deal with the Roman Catholic Church. When I asked to participate in her funeral liturgy, the pastor flat out said no. My wife is congregationalist, so she knew she couldn’t receive communion, and I knew, by the fact that I had allowed myself to be ordained outside the Roman Catholic Church, that Roman Catholic canon law forbids me from receiving communion. The curate offered me the Eucharist, which I declined, so that I wouldn’t jam him up with his pastor. After he blessed my mother’s casket, I thanked him for offering me communion, and he said, “Go in peace. I know you understand, but more importantly, so does Jesus Christ.” There’s a heart in the players, but the rules get in the way, preventing them from doing the right thing. I saw it in law enforcement, too: The people at the top get involved in all kinds of crap, but the “boots on the ground” look at each other and say, “I don’t care what they say; we have a job to do!” The higher-ups have no clue. The same thing happens in the Church!

Vanni: Thank you, Paul, for that lovely acknowledgement. I want to affirm our solidarity in your grief. I lost my mom in February, so you’ll be in my prayers and in all our prayers during the days ahead. I had a similar experience with the Eucharist: In May, I wore my clerical collar at the funeral of a dear friend and fellow theologian who was a priest at Pax Christi Catholic Community, where I raised my children. I knew that I couldn’t go to communion in my collar. It was extremely painful, but I did it intentionally to show my solidarity with those who are deprived of the Eucharist by their “family of origin,” the big, beautiful Roman Catholic Church. We actively witness to people who prefer to put their heads down and forget that there are people like Paul and Trish who could serve their community, but, despite God’s call, we are deprived of that opportunity by the structures of the system. Archbishop Bernard Hebda was

presiding and all the communion ministers were priests, so I would have drawn attention to myself had I stepped into the communion line, but to not go up was also a witness, as heartbreaking as it is. Those moments add to the grief: my grief for my mother and friend, and your grief for your mother. My heart goes out to you.

Buffone: Trish, my dear sister, I love you so much, and I want to echo what Paul said: Your words always stir me, and I learn so much from you. Marek noted last night that the Roman Catholic Womenpriests split after eight years. The question is raised: Is it in our nature in the Independent Sacramental Movement to split? Is it in our “DNA” to remain independent and to dig in our heels and split when something goes wrong? To use Marek’s words, why do we tend to pick up our toys and go play in a different sandbox? Even the Ecumenical Catholic Communion had its own schism early on. I love your metaphor of the constellation. Our beloved founding bishop, Peter Elder Hickman, wanted to do away with all labels. As his vicar early on, I remember him asking: Do we need all these labels: Independent, Orthodox, United, American, and on and on? Can’t we just be Catholic, and operate under the essence of what it means to be Catholic? All the structure and rules that any group creates apply only to that group. Can we reframe the way we think, to see splits in our movement as something that might not be bad? Can we accept that your group will operate differently from my group, but that we all hold on to the essence, the beauty, and the gift of the faith? We all do it differently, so I won’t tell you that you’re doing it wrong, and please don’t tell me that I’m doing it wrong. I will call you my sister or my brother, and I will identify in solidarity with you. You are Catholic in essence, so let’s create God’s kingdom instead of repeating all the mistakes of the past.

Vanni: The Church of the first century was profoundly diverse, and monolithic Christianity was a later development. There were so many fractious conversations, which is why Paul wrote his letters. Each community did its own thing. We may have to jettison the idea of uniformity, which is part of the Roman DNA. We need to ask ourselves: What does unity look like? Should we be working toward unity? My

inclination is to say yes, but it'll come through ecumenical dialogue, not uniformity, which is what we see in the ECC with its incredible spectrum of thinking and practice, with greater and lesser degrees of acceptance.

D'Arrigo: This conversation brought up so many realities. I've been trying hard to abstain from Facebook arguments. I used to try to be a voice of reason in such arguments, but I don't do that anymore because the voice of reason just ends up being another voice in the fight. I want to talk about tradition versus traditionalism. When I returned to the Christian faith, I joined the Episcopal Church instead of Rome, and I attended a very high Anglo-Catholic parish in Atlanta, where the pastor has since "swam across the Tiber" and is now back with Rome again. Many people don't know why they genuflect to the altar or bow to the scriptures—things they learned from their parents. There is so much dead traditionalism in the Church today. As a pastor, I have the great gift of serving an essentially non-Catholic community. Most of our people are from evangelical, non-denominational or Southern Baptists roots, with a couple of Anglicans and Roman Catholics thrown into the mix. Protestant folks have their traditions and traditionalism, too, like altar calls and magic words that you have to say in order to be saved—and if you don't say those words right, God doesn't have enough grace to fix that, and you won't be saved! Traditionalism is an issue in all faiths. We need to ask our lay people: What's important to you? Why is it important? How can we provide that for you? Trish, I appreciate that you always tie our conversations to our congregations. In my opinion, traditionalism seems like a refusal of any innovations in belief, worship and practice. All of us are willing to innovate in one way or another, as long as it holds true to the Spirit.

Quintana: We don't have to subscribe to a uniform monolith in order to be Catholic, as long as we hold true to sacred tradition. The Orthodox make the sign of the cross backwards from us, but they still hold true to the faith!

Brohl: During a Zoom meeting earlier this morning, we shared a meditation from Richard Rohr work, "Holy Dissent." He writes:

Inherent to all traditional religion is the peril of stagnation. What becomes settled and established may easily turn foul. Insight is replaced by clichés, elasticity by obstinacy, spontaneity by habit. Acts of dissent prove to be acts of renewal.

That may explain why we have a diversity of expressions within Catholicism, as well as the social climate of the 1960s, Vatican II, and everything that has led us to where we are today. Reverend Rosa repeated Bishop Hickman's question: Can't we just be Catholic? We acknowledge the roots of our tradition; being part of the Catholic community is an important thing! I have been promoting the idea of calling ourselves Independent Roman Catholics. I'm not sure why I would want to disassociate myself from the Roman Church, so I'm still stuck on that point.

Bozek: I have made a note to include "emergent legalism" in my future vocabulary. We can all point to examples of emerging legalism. When Pope Francis dedicated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in May, right-wing legalists noted how previous dedications of Russia were not "correctly" performed. This legalism might manifest itself within our movement in our focus on apostolic succession and the validity of our sacraments. Amid the storm that followed our excommunication in 2005, our lay people were comforted when the archbishop and his canon lawyers were forced to say in the public discourse that sacraments at St. Stanislaus are valid, even if they are illicit. Though we were rebelling, they were comforted to know that they have a "valid" priest. The idea of "valid" succession and "valid" sacraments may not be as important today as it was 17 years ago, but the Irish Catholics in our community are still very focused on not being Episcopalian or Protestant. For them, St. Stanislaus needs to be a "valid" Catholic parish with "valid" apostolic succession. That combination of Irish and Polish Catholicism creates a strange space in our parish—where lay people are more interested in these issues than clergy.

Vanni: Marek, you beautifully make my point: It's not about a particular outcome, but we need to do all of this thinking in dialogue. All four of my grandparents immigrated from

Ireland, and my grandfather fought in the uprising. For them, the Anglican Church was the church of the oppressors! We don't easily forget that. People have encouraged me to become an Episcopal priest—but 5,000 spirits would rise from their graves if I did so! It really comes back to the whole question of engagement. Marek needs to engage the folks of his community, and I need to engage the folks of my community. Our people are deeply embedded in certain self-understandings about being Catholic. In my case, most of the people at Charis were formed by one of the parishes that most realized the vision of Vatican II in the United States, so we very strongly bring that sensibility to the way we operationalize our ministry and how we see ourselves.

Aguillard: My view is admittedly iconoclast and non-dogmatic, so I don't see the mass as a magic spell that must be done in a certain way for the angels of God to hear and bless you. I agree that we should ask our congregations what they think. We may find out that they really don't care about some things! I have trouble with people telling me that what I believe is not "valid." Who are you to determine that for me? I am a "cradle Catholic" who left the Church during Vatican II. Decades later, after studying Hebrew and Hinduism, I came back. I discovered the Church of Antioch through a "Liberal Catholic" friend who wouldn't even ordain women! I appreciate that my bishop, Alan, wants to learn the *Novus Ordo* to "play well with others," but I know a lot of people who aren't concerned with whether certain things are "valid" or not.

Vanni: One posture of graciousness between jurisdictions is to recognize that when we are in Rome, we do as the Romans, and when we're in Austin, we do as the Austinites. Some of us rolled our eyes at Jayme's "cheat sheet" for concelebrants during a diaconal ordination in his parish in May, and we cracked up behind his back, but he knows what his community expects, and I'm delighted to participate in the prayer and liturgical experience of his community. I'm a bit of a liturgy geek, and I believe that ritual and gesture matter—but I didn't run home to Charis and say, "This is what we need to do!" My question is: Can we be gentle with one another?

Robison: When I was preparing for ordination with Reverend Linda Harrison, a young person came to me with a laundry list of questions: Why do we do this, rather than what the *Novus Ordo* says? Is it really Catholic if it's not the *Novus Ordo*? It was definitely a question of tradition versus traditionalism. If it wasn't what they knew, it wasn't really Catholic! We weren't really Catholic because we didn't have a guitar mass with the paperback missalettes that were the height of liturgical thought when we were kids! I felt I was having a conversation with fundamentalist Vatican II spirituality, and your words, Trish, about the "dead faith of the living" ring true. I have been very much affected by the writings of an Anglican priest, Percy Dermer, who lived during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Anglicans were copying the Tridentine masses, ritual, vestments and colors. When asked, they insisted they were simply following tradition. His research led him to other places, and he was sometimes persnickety and argumentative. His repeated question was: Why are you doing what you're doing, and is it connected to a living tradition? Is it spiritually edifying to copy the people down the street, or simply to do what Grandma told you to do? Or is it just habit?

L. Walker: This summer school has broadened and expanded my vision, to see that there is a place in Independent Catholicism for those who understand the councils and tradition of the Church, but who practice, profess and teach other non-Roman traditions. We are Catholic enough, broad enough, to include them. Without wanting to be divisive, I'm wondering if you might speak to those traditions that others might bring into our movement. What do we do when people bring into our tradition other expression of our faith, such things as Sufism or Zen Buddhism or other faith traditions that have their own scriptures?

Vanni: Leonard, you're speaking to the whole question of syncretism. Is there latitude to pull in different pieces of other traditions to construct something that's still fundamentally Christian, but has the reflections of other traditions in their journey to the Divine as part of it? That's a big topic. Seeing where we are as a movement, I ask: Can we all sit at the table and see others as fully Catholic and fully Christian despite their expanded horizons or

practices? Those questions become more acute as we try to bring together different jurisdictions, or as we try to celebrate and share together.

Ellis: Mother Trish, apropos to the topic of tradition versus traditionalism, perhaps nowhere is the expanse between tradition (the faith of the apostles) and traditionalism (the barnacles that have encrusted the hull of the church) more cavernous than in the sophist distinction between “valid” and “illicit.” Think about that for a minute. When people say that something is “valid but not licit,” they’re saying that you’re inviting Jesus in good faith to show up, and he’s showing up, but he’s not happy about it! You would search in vain in the gospel to find an occasion where that was the case. Why should we even take this seriously?

Leary: When the Roman Church is unhappy, it wants us to believe that Jesus is unhappy!

Vanni: The kookiness around the Eucharist is particularly acute. I had a brilliant professor of liturgical theology, Father Kevin Seasoltz, a monk of St. John’s Abbey and an international lion of the liturgy. He edited *Worship* magazine for a big chunk of his career, and I remember him standing in front of our class, railing in his stentorian voice against the idea that wine has to be made from grapes or that bread has to be made from wheat. These elements of the Roman system are culturally burdensome and inappropriate! Even within the Roman world, there are all kinds of expanded ideas. When we first convened Charis, before I was ordained, community members wanted to immediately begin celebrating mass – and I started thinking, through a Roman Catholic worldview, “but we don’t have consecrated matter!” I stopped and remembered Kevin, and I said, “We’re going to break bread and share a cup, and we’re going to ride on the wings of the Holy Spirit and let Her decide, as a good and gracious God, what happens when we say that prayer and we pass that bread and wine! Others could not have gotten away with that, but it was perfect for my community, which believes that Christ is present in the breaking of the bread and when the priestly people of God are gathered in prayer. I still pursued becoming a deacon and a priest because there’s something

very beautiful about Holy Orders. I'm not ready to chuck all of that. The ordered ministry emerged in service to God's people, and we have to anchor it back in its earliest self-understanding. I'm not going to out myself on what I did on a couple of mornings when there was no bread for Charis, but I can tell you a few funny stories over coffee!

Ellis: I completely agree with you about the offices of the church being primarily offices of service. Apostolic succession—which hasn't always succeeded—is first and foremost a succession of faith, secondly of service, and only thirdly of office.

Frame: I followed a different path from many of you. I was raised in a Lutheran church and became a Unitarian Universalist as soon as I left home. I was a Unitarian Universalist for the next 15 years, with all the good social projects in St. Petersburg, Florida. Then I met Independent Catholic bishop, Chuck Leahy. His honesty, realism and love for God convinced me, and I let him ordain me a deacon. The Catholic liturgy won't serve us in all contexts. I was recently asked to pray at a protest to unionize bus drivers. Most of the folks there were African American, and I was drawn into a very different prayer experience that the Catholic liturgy could not have prepared me for. The liturgy can also feel hurtful or removed. I recently attended a funeral where the priest read the entire liturgy from a book. I draw several resources from a website call Reimagining Worship. Karl Barth suggested writing sermons with the scriptures in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Vanni: We all have the inclination to reify our idea of the Church, whatever that is. You mention the African-American community, one of the oldest Catholic communities in the United States. It's a community that has lived through stunning oppression and transformation. It's a community that has never shied from the effective worship of God. Is there a space in our movement for those emergent Catholics, as they crop up? We have a beautiful Latino Catholicism in this very diverse country. One of the hardships for the Latino community was the imposition of the monastic understanding of liturgy on the Church from Vatican II: taking down images, streamlining worship, and



stripping the experience of so much that resonated with Latino Catholics. Is there a space for the *santos* [saints] and pious practices and Our Lady of Guadalupe? Catholicism as a whole has so many different expressions, and we don't want to cement any particularity – neither our own, nor a fantastical imagining of a church in New York in 1942.

Plemmons: We're talking about different ways to see our faith. As a member of the First Nations who was ordained at a time when we were discovering how our elders were treated as little babies at residential schools, and how some of them disappeared, I put those stories into a stole as a way to integrate those realities of who I am and the ways that God has touched me. As Catholics of the First Nations, we do liturgy differently. If you ever get a chance, quietly attend a Kateri Circle or read the Native American New Testament, which tells scriptural stories the way our Elders would tell them. As Deacon Melina suggests, we meet the needs and answer the moment—just as we did when we provided remote services during COVID. A number of communities invited viewers to find their own bread and wine and to echo in their homes what the priest was doing, so that they could touch into that sacrament. They left it to later theologians to ask what was happening in the sacraments during those two years, and they trusted that they were serving the people.

Vanni: Mir, what a joy and privilege to see your stole. I know it's been a work of enormous heart, thought and creativity for you. Thank you, too, for standing for the first people who were on this continent and for honoring them. Clergy of the ECC received a letter asking them to talk about virtual services as "paraliturgies." I'm glad I never saw that letter. I believe the people of God will help us to reflect on what happened. That's secondary theology. Primary theology is the experience, and secondary theology is the way we reflect on the experience and decide what it means. The moment called for primary theology. It did not call for us to second-guess, based on our different theological trainings, what is or is not. As a result of the pandemic, our community now has 20-some people dialing in for our liturgies. Like the canyon in the PBS video that I spoke of during our gathering in Las Vegas, we are experiencing a

new flourishing of creativity! The “conifers” that quickly established themselves are dying, and a new creativity is flourishing in the “canyon” of Catholicism.

D'Arrigo: Jesus met everybody where they were. He didn't expect them to change right away. We've spent 2,000 years utilizing our liturgy to meet people where they are, and we forget that they're evolving! One of the joys of Independent Catholicism is that we can jump onto the evolutionary “train”! We can meet people where they are. We're taking a major evolutionary leap forward. The reforms of Vatican II stalled, and we jumped in and picked them up. We are the ones who said, “We can do this! We can move forward with the reform of the Church!” We are an evolving species, and we need to evolve as a community and as a Church, if we are going to continue to serve folks by meeting them where they are. Many people don't care about ancient traditions or apostolic succession. What they care about is that their lives are dark, and they want to see some light. They're frustrated, and they want to know whether God can help.

Quintana: I was hoping that we might address the traditionalism that we see among younger folks. Many young Roman Catholics are very conservative in their theology, and they want Tridentine masses.

Vanni: I don't think that's true. I did a lot of work with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolic (CARA), and their samples are invariably young people in cathedral groups and Catholic, university campus ministries, which have become very conservative. Sure, you could find a small, devoted group of traditionalist young people at the cathedral of St. Paul, living an expression of faith that likely tracks to the 1940s, but to characterize all young people in that way would be to neglect the massive group of de-churched or barely churched or “roaming” Roman Catholic young adults who are looking for something very different from that and who have no interest in that. We have to really be careful about falling prey to the Roman Catholic trope that we've gotten more conservative or that that's really what young people want. There's a sustaining narrative concerning this.

## Achieving Inclusivity through a New Paradigm

Rev. Karen Furr

Several years ago, a Roman priest, who also served as an Ojibwe medicine man, began a teaching with these words that we've all heard:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Elohim. And the word was Elohim. Everything existed through His hands, and without Him not even one thing existed of all the things that have existed. In Him was life, and the life was the light of people and the light shines in the darkness. The darkness did not overtake it. (Jn. 1:1-5)

John understood that words have power, and that the Word of God was present in the beginning. Nothing was created, nothing came into being that did not first come through the Christ consciousness—the consciousness of God. All spiritual paths on the face of the planet—including Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism and White Buffalo Calf Woman—have their origins in the Word! That informs our views on the formation of belief systems. No one is all right, and no one is all wrong. All the paths that I've explored in my life—and there have been many—came through the Word. Nothing that I have explored—from Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, to indigenous spiritualities, fundamentalist Christianity, and the Charismatic Renewal, which is how I came into the Catholic Church—did not have its origin in the Word.

I'm not a "cradle Catholic," so I was surprised to hear things like, "If you go to a Protestant church, you're going to go to hell!" It wasn't until the late 1970s that I stepped into some of what you all grew up with. How in the world did we screw things up so badly that we arrived at such a thought? That rhetorical question is a metaphor for what is being asked of us as we go through a paradigm shift unlike anything our species has seen, where we are now at risk of surviving as a planet.

Chaos fills our world and ourselves. In my ministry of energy healing, a lot of people tell me they feel like they're falling apart. They don't know what's happening. Is it the politics of our nation? Or climate change? Is it Russia's involvement in Ukraine? Or fossil fuels? Those issues don't even begin to touch the undercurrent of it.

Physicist Thomas Kuhn coined the term "paradigm shift" to describe when everything changes. We might learn something new, for instance, that changes everything. A "paradigm shift" is a perfect description of what's happening within our world today and within us. Before

Copernicus, the prevailing thought was that the earth was the center of the universe. Our species was the center of the universe, and everything revolved around us! Our species was at the top of the pyramid of creation. Copernicus' heliocentric views – that our solar system revolves around the sun – changed everything. Those who were comfortable with old ways of seeing the world resisted this change. It takes tremendous humility to admit that we're not the center of the universe. New information has changed the way that we see ourselves, challenging the structured, linear, controllable, male models through which we once saw the world. Young people today are coming to see our world in new ways!

Do you remember the first time that you saw a photo of the earth from outer space, that you saw the earth in its entirety? Our home looks like a stunningly beautiful marble, with no fences or borders!

We're not able to structure or regulate our inner lives, as we do our outer lives. As embodied beings in a physical world, we're not able to imagine the infinite nature of creation or of limitless space. That's true as we look outward, but also as we look inward. One famous video shows the human person as it expands beyond us in powers of ten, to the "far reaches" of space; then it goes deep inside the human hand in powers of ten – and it's just as "spacious" as the exterior. Mathematically, we are limitless! How in the world might we step into this new paradigm? How might we see ourselves and our universe as limitless and infinite? How does this new paradigm affect our definitions and systems? Jayme has mentioned the need for our movement to overcome old paradigms of sexism and patriarchy: Young people are passing us by as they move into a new and very different worldview – and they no longer see as relevant the institutions created under old paradigms, which are hardly relevant now! Unless we quickly become relevant, in a paradigm of limitlessness, we're going to be "left behind." How might we internalize this new paradigm as individuals and as a people of God?

We do well to consider what this new paradigm means for our theologies. Physics tells us that even if Jesus ascended at the speed of light, he'd still be in our galaxy. That belief is founded on an old Christian paradigm and an old Christian cosmology, when we imagined a flat earth with heaven above and hell below. What do we do when old paradigms and cosmologies no longer work? Do we try to figure it out – or do we just let it ride and see how it unfolds, which is a feminine model. Our task is not to reform the Church. Our task is not to set up structures for governance.

One possible way to work ourselves into a new paradigm that we've never experienced might be through love and light. Such inner work is

deeper and more difficult than giving a big hug or lighting a candle. We come into this world through the Word, which tells us that God's love is without limit. "For God so loved the world." What inner work does each of us have to do to be a vessel of God's love in the world today? I love history and theology, but it's not my calling to read books and study. I admire people who do that. Every time I hear something like that, I ask: What does this have to do with love? Is God limited to the ways in which we've traditionally thought of God coming into this world? Is God "out there," or how might we better conceive of the presence of the Divine in ourselves and others? Jesus gave us a new paradigm, one that goes inward, challenging us to really understand the teachings of Jesus in a new and different way. Don't "box" God in! Let Jesus and the Holy Spirit out of the "box," too! When we think anew about our faith, it redefines who we are and what we do. It redefines old concepts like gender, masculinity, feminism, climate change—even Catholicism! All our sacred writings spring from old paradigms, perhaps even inhibiting us from fully perceiving infinitely.

It's much easier for younger people to change. Those of us who are older have constructed our ways of making sense of the world. We've read the writings of those who've gone before us. We've been told what to believe. We've been handed creeds, norms and canons. To bring Jesus into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we're going to have to let him ride and see what happens.

There's no way for us to control God or religion or the Church. We'll just spin our wheels! When people look back on us 1,000 years from now, how will they judge us? Did we cling to old paradigms, or did we aid the transition to what will be?

We're challenged to really trust the Holy Spirit—and not simply our understandings of the Holy Spirit. And we're challenged to allow people to embrace their own stories. Anthropologists and scientists tell us that Native Americans crossed onto this continent from Siberia, but Native Americans speak of their origins here. The Navajo have two creation stories: Can we let go of our entitlement, our desires to label others and tell them where they came from? Can we allow others to control their narratives? Apply that to any difference we have as human beings—because in the new paradigm, there are no differences. We're not totally right, and others are not totally wrong. In the old paradigm, we could think that we were right, and that the world is black and white. The new paradigm is grey!

Trish spoke this afternoon about allowing our liturgies to emerge according to the needs of those we serve. Can we allow this? It goes

against old paradigms that seek to control and regulate liturgy and the sacraments! Can we allow our great diversity to be the incredible healing presence that our world needs right now? Can we say, “You don’t do liturgy the same way I do liturgy, and that’s okay”? Can we embrace change, rather than attempt to control it? Can we create a space for it and allow it to happen organically?

There are two aspects of this new paradigm that may be especially challenging for us. The first is that all life is sentient. We measure the intelligence of other species according to our own intelligence. That’s old-paradigm thinking! Can we accept the intelligence of trees and their ability to communicate with other trees and with their offspring? Can we accept the intelligence and communication of other species? Can we accept that plants have thoughts and emotions, skills and desires? Can we accept that they can even “sing”? Several years ago, I participated in a workshop that included a transfiguration ceremony. We focused on a plant in Scotland, and a resonance gas camera measured the change in the emotional, physical and spiritual energy of that plant. Think about that for a moment: We were able to enhance that plant’s energy indicators! Do we have to categorize such communication as “woo woo” or paganism, or can we simply allow it to be?

The other challenge is being attentive to our languaging. Our language tends to be so negative. We talk, for instance, about how it is that we don’t yet have the language to talk about certain things. We tend to describe things by what they’re not. Did you notice the word “not” in those two sentences? Our negative languaging hampers our ability to step into the infiniteness of our possibilities. We frame our worldview by what it isn’t, prohibiting us from moving into the positive. Notice the ways in which we do this as a movement.

Jayne had asked whether I might focus this talk on the need for our movement to continue overcoming sexism, racism, patriarchy and clericalism—to be more truly inclusive. Entitlement and hierarchy are embedded in all of these! These elements of the old paradigm demand control over others who are “not” like those who claim such control and power. I’m not bashing guys when I speak of White male patriarchy, but the question arises: How will we address this from the perspective of emerging paradigms? How does our understanding of these need to change? What shifts need to occur in our thinking for us to come into a new paradigm?

These old paradigms have become systemic. Racism, for instance, is not merely about one person not liking a person of another color; it’s about our embeddedness in systems that enforce age-old paradigms!

Transparency is a key component of the new paradigm if we are going to learn to recognize the Infinite. We see how problematic are the governments and religious institutions that thrive on secretiveness. With greater transparency, we're able to see the undercurrents, and we perceive the change that needs to organically happen without us trying to orchestrate it.

"Women" and "men," too, are categories of the old paradigm. We attempt to categorize everything: Roman Catholics are over there, and Inclusive Catholics are over here. Men are here, and women are there. That's the old paradigm! Cosmologist Brian Swimme invites us to imagine that when we contemplate the role of the sun, the moon and the stars in our lives, that's Earth herself doing the contemplation! Earth herself is growing spiritually, coming into her own, and helping us—because we are the result of Earth creating herself as human! Just as Earth creates herself as water and trees, she also creates herself as human. The Earth contemplates with and through us. She grows spiritually along with us!

This sounds "out there," I know. Go outside, pause for a moment, and put your hand on a tree or a rock. Feel the connection. Open yourself to an experience of oneness! Understand that there is no separation between us and nature. A hundred years from now, when humans have interiorized the concept of the Infinite, they will walk into the woods—if they're still around—and communicate in ways that can't be imagined in old paradigms.

As we sense that old paradigms no longer fit, we feel ourselves being stretched and pulled. Do you sense that in your prayer life and in your ministry? Do you open yourself and allow yourself to experience that? I really believe that the Holy Spirit is bringing us into an experience that we've never had before, an experience that is absolutely in line with what Jesus was trying to give to us 2,000 years ago. How willing are we to let the Spirit move us in new directions? Imagine for a moment if the Second Coming were less about Jesus' return and more about the change in attitude and understanding of what it means to love one another and live with one another! What if the Second Coming is really a change of consciousness and an experience of infinity?

We have a lived experience of the living God within us and of the Word through which everything in the universe was created. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to teach us, move in us, and create in us what the Holy Spirit wants to create. Let us trust that the Holy Spirit is opening to us ways that we could never have imagined 100 years ago!

## **Reflections on Achieving Inclusivity through a New Paradigm**

Aguillard: I'm thrilled you've brought up this subject. Thinking about the sentience of all life has placed me on the fringe for most of my life, and conversations like this are necessary to help us cope with the change in paradigms we are all experiencing! So many textbooks are based on old paradigms and need to be rewritten. Entire careers are based on old paradigms!

Furr: When I learned world history in high school, it focused on the origins of Western peoples, near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in the Fertile Crescent. We never learned anything about the people of China, Southeast Asia or India. New worldviews threaten all that we've learned and believe that we know. We try to align everything with the worldviews with which we're comfortable, even though this negates the great diversity of our planet. As a result, we're not able to "step out of the box" – or even to realize that there's no box there to begin with!

Aguillard: We're like the people in the Middle Ages, who were not able to conceive of the Renaissance. We're stretching toward a new paradigm that we can't fully fathom. I like your positivism, though, and your belief that humanity will survive and continue to evolve into the kind of beings that we believe we can be—without killing our planet or ecosystem.

Furr: I'll "go out on a limb" with you: I facilitated a monthly gathering in Flagstaff for a year, as we imagined working with our descendants, the descendants of humankind, who live far in the future after all of the present craziness of the world is settled. We attempted to step out of time and space, to access the past, present and future. We asked those descendants to come and work with us for a year. We asked them: What is the significance of the earth events that are going on right now? At that time, in 2010-2011, we were confronting the Gulf oil spill, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and a major earthquake in Chile. They said that they honor their ancestors of this generation because we made what I have come to call the Great Decision: We decided to



honor the Earth and stop destroying this planet. In her love for us, the Earth took on everything that we threw at her, with the hope that we would learn of the effects of our actions. With great love and compassion, she allowed us to kill Amazon rainforests, pollute Gulf waters, and strip-mine her resources. In the end, we recognized the power of our greed, the futility of fossil fuels, and the damage that we had done throughout the world. The Earth supported us during that learning process. Like parents, who let their children make and learn from their mistakes, the Earth allowed us to learn, so that future generations could learn from us, their ancestors. It's going to take an incredibly significant event to jar us to this new way of thinking. We are killing ourselves and our planet. When I see the sacrificial nature of the Earth for our commitment to learning, it doesn't surprise me that Jesus came and was sacrificed! Our planet is passing through a similar redemptive suffering right now.

J. Walker: To connect with the light of God in all things is another way of speaking of the sentience of all things. I was part of a Word and Life group (<https://wordandlife.us/about-us/>) in Santa Barbara, which studied *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul* for ten weeks. It's a book by John Philip Newell, who focuses on the incredible tradition in Celtic spirituality of seeing all things as possessing a soul, or "alive in Christ," if that is your language. All creation is filled with the light of God and the light of Christ! Influenced by the likes of St. Augustine and others who believed that anything outside the Church was evil and that creation was "fallen," the pope of the day declared this spirituality a heresy. This vilification of the universe led us to name our local community "the Cosmic Christ," where we openly talk about the light and life force of God in all things, even before Jesus, who definitely connected with that life force. The Cosmic Christ is in *all* things! With respect to the ruining of our planet, there are two ways to motivate us humans to change our ways: through fear, or through love—and Jesus was a teacher of love!

Furr: We also need to understand that love is a state of being. To think that love is something we do is so egocentric! We allow ourselves to become the embodiment of love. We are love! That's what Jesus was about. He never said how to do it. He

just said to do it: "Love one another." He understood the nature of love, so when he said, "I give you this commandment: Love one another," I simply imagine his friends misunderstanding him and saying, "But we already do that!"

D'Arrigo: Your words brought to mind three things for me. First, my former spiritual director used to speak about the Native American notion of "landscape": how we try to completely harmonize with the land we live on, knowing that land is a gift of the Earth that we cannot own. Second, it can be extremely hard for those of us who are Western and/or who were formerly Roman Catholic to hear things like the sentience of plants, or how plants "sing" and communicate with one another. It's hard for us to say, "That sounds completely reasonable!" The scriptures contain some possible lessons. The three people in the furnace in Daniel 3 sing God's praises, saying things like, "All you mountains and hills, praise the Lord! All you plants and trees, praise the Lord!" Our Jewish ancestors acknowledged the sentience of creation, the spark of the Divine in all creation! In Luke 19:40, Jesus speaks of the stones crying out. Even he acknowledged the divine spark in the inanimate objects that can connect us with God! Even Genesis commands us to be stewards of the earth, to treat it as lovingly as we treat our families or pets! It all comes down to the *Shema*, Jesus' commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself. If we do that, our paradigm will shift!

Furr: Another scriptural reference is the groaning of all creation (Rom. 8:22). Perhaps you've heard such "groaning" in nature!

Quintana: My favorite poet is Gerard Manley Hopkins, who was forever writing poems about how creation is charged with the presence of God, so I certainly have an ear for what you are saying. As we understand how God charges and infuses creation, we will certainly have a different take on how we should be stewards of creation, rather than lords over it. The Native Americans were tremendous stewards of creation: Before they killed a buffalo, they prayed to it and thanked it

for sustaining them. They had a sense of how the Spirit permeated and infused creation!

Furr: When the Navajo butcher a sheep, an older family member will watch the process and speak in Navajo what I sense is a prayer thanking and blessing the sheep. It's a holy, sacred moment.

Quintana: They honor the divinity of creation! Our extractive industries have virtually destroyed and raped our environment. It's absolutely sinful. If we had a sense of God permeating creation, we would love creation, rather than dominate it.

Božek: Your words and metaphors bring to mind my seminary classes in cosmology. We studied the philosophy of nature for two semesters. I truly agree that we evolving into the Cosmic Christ and into a complementarity of all people and languages. We are all trying to articulate and communicate the divine Mystery, which can only be understood when all are heard. We think that those who have less seminary studies simply need to study a few liturgical classes—and we fail to equip them with such important studies as ethics, pastoral ministry and cosmology. When we lived under communism in Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s, my father and grandfather were forest rangers, so my sister and I grew up in the woods. My sister and the animals were my playmates, and we enjoyed a loving connection with creation. My grandfather had multiple beehives, so from the age of six, I helped him to smoke the hives and remove the honey. I remember once complaining about a bee sting, and he replied, "It hurt the bee more than it hurt you. That bee will die as a result of stinging you." It's not in their interest to hurt us, and it's not in our interest to hurt one another!

Ellis: Your words brought to mind the works of former Dominican priest Matthew Fox and specifically his book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. As Catholics, we have seven sacraments—but I think we should have 700! You have articulated a certain deep and abiding reverence for the holiness of everything around us. That is thoroughly Catholic and could bridge several divides!

Furr: Reading Fox's book *Original Blessing* was a very transformative experience for me. His views got him into a lot of trouble!

Ellis: There's a funny story about him. He was silenced by the Church for a year, and at the end of that year, he was invited to speak at a consortium. Everyone was excited that his year of silence was over and that he would be speaking again. When he ascended to the podium, his first words were, "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted..."

Furr: That's Matthew Fox!

Leary: As a Christian Brother, I was responsible for the maintenance of 23 acres of buildings, grounds and trails, which helped my meditation. During my 20+ years in law enforcement, I was involved with our state forests and lands and our communication sites on Mount Washington, the highest point in the East. I spent an awful lot of time up on that mountain, respecting nature. I'm still dealing with the fact that I am White and male, that I'm a racist, and other things I've been told—and now you talk about this paradigm change! I was raised in the 1950s and 1960s, so change is hard. It's difficult for those of us who are older. It touches on things that we feel very deeply, and on how we frame our life experiences. When I deal with younger people, I become aware of their different perspectives. I continue to be challenged beyond belief!

Furr: I might recommend two very enlightening books. *The Death of Truth* explores how the nature of truth has changed during the last few years. *The Lie that Binds* explores the formation of the "right to life" movement, which includes a good deal of deception and our attempt to control chaos. Both bring greater transparency to our political sphere. Many of us wonder what happened in our 2016 Presidential election. It revealed our need to do the necessary inner work to deal with the shadow of our nation!

Aguillard: Healing and reconciliation are so difficult. Back in the 1970s, I attended a conference with a former physician who helped people find healing through visual imagery. He led a guided meditation where he asked participants to imagine a very powerful child sitting in their brains, a child who can do and

provide anything for us, if treated kindly. Our challenge, he said, is to discover what that child wants. As we engaged in the meditation, a young surgeon stormed out of the room, saying, "This is bullsh\*t!" The child in his brain simply wanted him to tell his father that he loved and forgave him. Sometimes we know exactly what we need to do to achieve healing—but we can't open our minds and accept it. I admit it was difficult for me to understand why Alan wanted to learn the *Novus Ordo*. We talked about it for weeks. When I opened my mind and heard those words, "When in Rome, do as the Romans," it "clicked," and I was able to say, "Go for it!"

## Beyond the Church & Society of Yesteryear: Non-binary Theology & Experience

Dr. Megan DeFranza  
Rev. River Fallon  
Rev. Danielle Grace  
Rev. Davi Hayes  
Amy Hicox  
Rev. Mir Plemmons  
Very Rev. MichaelAngelo D'Arrigo, Moderator

### Non-Binary Folks in the Bible

Very Rev. MichaelAngelo D'Arrigo

Genetically, I was born intersex. I have Klinefelter syndrome, though I don't like calling it that. Chromosomally, males are XY, and females are XX. I'm XXY. So, it's an honor and privilege to facilitate this panel conversation on non-binary theology and experience.

In our Christian understanding of Judaism, we tend to overlook the way in which the Judeo-Christian scriptures look at gender. Within Judaism, there are eight genders in the rabbinic teachings of the Talmud, the written version of oral Jewish law. There are *zachar* and *nekevah*, which are XX male and XY female. There is *androgynos*, a Greek work meaning that a person possesses both male and female characteristics. There is *tumtum*, which is the lack of sexual characteristics. *Aylonit hamah* is identified female at birth but later develops male characteristics, and *saris hamah* is identified male at birth but later develops female characteristics. *Aylonit adam* and *saris adam* are similar, except that they develop through human intervention.

Being non-binary is not a new concept: Within the rabbinic tradition, Adam was believed to be without gender. Before the splitting of male and female, Adam was literally, completely non-binary!

Talmudic rabbis believed that Abraham and Sarah were *tumtum*, lacking sexual characteristics, then miraculously transformed into a fertile husband and wife in their old age.

We're also intimately familiar with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Book of Daniel. I spoke of their song in the furnace last night. As you listen to these words, try to figure out why they are seen as binary:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials (Eunuchs), to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.

It is impossible that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would have been assigned to the chief of the court officials had they not been made eunuchs!

We also have the story of Philip, the Ethiopian eunuch. Any time that the bible says "eunuch," we can bet that the person falls under one of those non-binary definitions.

We find another key scripture in Isaiah 56:3-5, which says:

Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better

than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.”

And, of course, Jesus echoes this exact line of scripture in Matthew 19:11-12.

Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

The Bible has always featured non-binary folks!

### **The Struggle Between the Lines**

Chaplain Mir Plemmons

I am a presbyter in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and I am a professed member of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, which has a startling number of non-binary people. This might connect back to an important member of Francis’ own generation: of “Brother Jacoba.” You might look up her story.

I am also intersex, which is why my T-shirt today says, “Cisn’t.” We talk about gender using a lot of Latin, so to be *cis*-something—forgive me, siblings—means to be the more normative, the more expected version of something. The cissexual was contrasted with the transsexual in attempts to describe other understandings of one’s own identity. That language is, of course, from the early discussions and now we speak of cisgender and transgender.

Michelangelo and I have known proven, provable and inarguable biological things that have happened to us. There are primary sex-link characteristics that come in, that are the really obvious parts about whether you have bulges above or below. There are also secondary sex-link characteristics that control a lot of the biochemistry. Every genetic decision is an on/off switch in sequence, and we end up out of that cisgender normative programming.

For me, I had most of my primary sex-link characteristics showing female, but you know how girls go through puberty first, and then boys go through it a little later in age? I went through female puberty—and then we were all surprised when I went through male puberty! That was a shocker. Then I ended up with a significant chest, which, to everyone



around me, out-voted all other possible options, including my masculine mannerisms and my masculine interests. I'm stereotypical: People look at me and say, "You're such a guy!" That's the genetics and biochemistry of it. When I was a teen, they wanted to chemically alter me, to put me on a massive amount of birth control, to give me enough estrogens to shut down the androgens. They wanted to engage in biochemical warfare in my body, to change the balance, which was somewhere in the middle. That's difficult for people to cope with. I don't fit a nice and easy binary. People wonder: "You're a guy now. Does that make you straight?" I'm intersex. Tell me: What exactly is my gender? What exactly is the opposite of my gender? There are all these riches out there, and those of us who struggle between the lines often develop a deeper understanding of masculinity and femininity. We have something profound that we can share with everyone else.

### **Your Faith is Your Birthright**

Deacon Davi Hayes

I serve as pastor of Mustard Seed Eastern Catholic Church in Frederick, Maryland, and I identify as genderqueer or non-binary. I grew up in the Byzantine Catholic Church, and I recall passionately singing hymns during services and telling my mother that I wanted to be a priest when I grew up. She shot me down right away because, of course, only boys could be priests in the church. I asked hopefully: "Can I be a deacon or altar server?" The best I could hope for as a girl was to be a cantor, if a man was unavailable. I thought that was so strange because vestments look an awful lot like dresses and, in the binary, it's the girls who wear the dresses!

The Byzantine Catholic Church and many canonical churches are pretty stuck within the binary and with traditional gender roles, which have absolutely nothing to do with what the Bible says. But I didn't know that as a child. I assumed that my parents and clergy spoke for God, and I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to be a good Christian. I've spent a long time disentangling God's message from that of human beings. Often these message are contrary to each other, but I grew up in the Church, I loved the Church, and, because I felt a calling, I allowed myself to become entrenched. I was so entrenched in the Church that I was ignorant of my own sexuality and gender identity well into my adulthood.

Growing up, I remember feeling that I didn't fit in with the girls or the boys. I didn't care about the same things. I often had interests of both

groups, and I remember wanting to grow breasts in middle school so that I could finally be like the other girls around me, so that my interests would magically change and align to my biological gender, and I could finally fit in at school and church and everywhere else. That didn't happen. Then I thought that having a boyfriend would help me to be the person that society was telling me to be. After walking the path that the Church told me to walk—I was married with two beautiful children—I came out as lesbian in my late 20s.

In many ways, I should have been happy and counting my blessings, but I wasn't. There was a voice screaming within me. There was something wrong with the life I was living. It was more than intuition. God and the Holy Spirit were calling me to walk another path. It wasn't an easy path by any means, but it has been the truest. I lost my marriage. I lost my non-affirming mother. I lost my kids half the time. I lost most of my friends. Foolishly or not, my church was the last thing I expected to lose, because I was always taught that God loved me, and that Christ suffered and died on the cross for me. I lost my church, which possessed a concept of *conditional* love. I was told outright that I was unwelcomed. Members of my congregation told me to go back to my husband and save my marriage. I knew that I could not be true to myself and be an active member of my parish at the same time. And so I stepped away from the church for almost a decade.

I joined the Episcopal Church for a while. I dabbled in Buddhism and Judaism. Nothing felt right. I also did things to masculinize myself: I cut my hair short, I began exclusively wearing men's clothes, I stopped wearing makeup, and eventually I started binding my chest. It was strange: While I didn't feel like a woman, I didn't really feel like a man either. It was an isolating place to be, and there were very few examples in society—and even fewer in the church—of non-binary people who explicitly discussed what we are discussing today. More than two genders appear in religious literature!

After my wife and I got married, we attended D.C. Pride, where I saw a Byzantine cross: It was a booth for Axios, a group for Eastern and Orthodox LGBT Christians. The man at the booth was a parishioner from the church where I grew up in: He always attended church by himself, and it never occurred to anyone that he might be gay. He was in my midst my entire childhood, and I never knew he had a partner of over 25 years. He had completely separated his religious life from his personal life—and he still does to this day. When I told him my story and why I walked away from the church, he said something that sticks to me to this day: "Your faith is your birthright. No one can take your faith from you."

It really started to “click” for me: I had conflated God and the Church as being one and the same. I walked away from God because of the way that other humans treated me, but God never walked away from me. God never gave up on me. God was always there, always cheering me on to be exactly the way God made me. The whole idea of faith being a birthright has really been my North Star, my guiding light.

After my twins, Teddy and Noah, were born, the Eastern Christian churches in my area outright refused to baptize them because their parents were both born biologically female. I started getting involved with the Independent Sacramental Movement, and I started my own Eastern Catholic church, which ministers to the LGBT community.

Today is the one-year anniversary of my top surgery. I talked to my doctor earlier today about this conversation, and I said, “I’m actively trying to be the person God made me to be—and that person is non-binary.” I’m not worrying about what other people might think anymore. I’m exploring and learning about non-binary people throughout history and in the Bible, because representation is super-important.

One of my children has come out as non-binary, and our faith and church have been crucial. We can talk about how the angels are non-binary. Because they are not physical beings, God and the Holy Spirit have no gender. We no longer feel the need to step into neat “boxes,” because those boxes don’t exist.

In the Eastern Christian tradition, we speak of *theosis* or union with God. We cannot live *theosis* unless we authentically live and present ourselves to each other and to God with the truth of who we are. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn. 14:6). For me, that means acknowledging that God intentionally created me and my path, and that my destiny is to serve God and others as a non-binary person. It isn’t an easy path, but it is a lighter path. I am no longer burdened by the unrealistic expectations of others, and I can be myself!

### **There’s No Hate like Christian “Love”**

Rev. River Fallon

My name is River, but my old name was Braden, so people who knew me before my transition to non-binary, genderqueer person still call me Braden, especially my family. I prefer being called River, and I’ll soon legally change my name. I grew up in the Southern Baptist Church, and I no longer affiliate myself with a particular denomination, but Michelangelo can confirm that I’m still very Baptist when I pray!

As a kid, I knew that I was different. I was ordained a minister at age 16. I don't say this lightly: The Southern Baptist Church engages in very cultlike behaviors, and I was told that I was destined to do this. I felt a calling, but the whole theology of the Southern Baptist Church is just so awful. I knew that there was no way that I could continue down that road.

At age 17, I came out as gay. I had to resign from my position in the church, but my family and friends were super-supportive. I like to think that, perhaps due to my involvement in the church, they decided a couple of years later to break away from the Southern Baptist Convention. They disagreed with the Southern Baptist stance on homosexuality and the LGBTQIA community.

I'm currently in the pre-production phase for a documentary called "Christian Love." Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "There's no hate like Christian 'love.'" I hope to interview people who were affected by their church, who were thrown or kicked out of their churches or who were told that they're going to hell. This is an important topic that needs to be discussed.

I have many family members who are Southern Baptist, and it hasn't progressed in 30 years. They still believe the same stuff that they did in the 1980s and 1990s. They're still preaching that today. Their numbers are getting smaller, and they're still influential, but I'm hoping to make a difference through this documentary.

People are unintentionally hurtful. My husband and I have been married for seven years, and I'm transitioning from male to female. He has been super-supportive, but I have the most trouble with my immediate family, and our relationship is super-strained. My family may never be okay with a different truth than the one that they're used to. That's true for a lot of people who aren't willing to change how they feel or how they see God. The Southern Baptist Church in particular likes to put God in a tiny "box" of what it expects God to be. These notions of God become engrained in us, and it's a lifelong struggle to take God out of that "box"!

## **Living with Catholic Guilt and Baptist Judgmentalism**

Rev. Danielle Grace

I grew up in the 1970s in South Louisiana, where I like to joke that there are more Catholics than people. I was born male, and by age six or seven, I started realizing I wasn't who I was born to be. I envied my younger sister, and I tried on her clothes and my mom's clothes. That's

probably what most trans kids do. When I was 18, I moved to South Mississippi where I ended up in a Southern Baptist church. In the back of my mind, I really hoped that would fix me. I prayed a lot and spent a lot of time at the altars of Baptist and Pentecostal churches, asking God to fix me. A year later, I felt a call to ministry, and I thought, "There's no way. I am so messed up!" A year later, I finally surrendered and went into ministry, and I preached my first sermon in 1992. I hoped that would fix me. It didn't. I attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for a semester, hoping they would fix me. They didn't. I married my wife, had kids, and struggled with my gender.

Then ten years ago, I was doing what every good Baptist and Christian pastor should do: I was reading the entire bible in a year for the umpteenth time—and it struck me that the Book of Joshua was talking about genocide. I started questioning everything I believed, to the point that I started doubting the existence of God. At that time, I had been a Southern Baptist pastor for 16 years. In fact, I was Southern Baptist pastor until last May. I had to deconstruct the faith and figure out what I believed. I spent a lot of time reading the gospels and reconstructing Jesus. I removed my Roman Catholic goggles, my Southern Baptist goggles, and every other set of goggles that shaped how I saw Jesus.

I did a lot of heavy lifting in the gym, trying to squash every bit of dysphoria. I finally broke down and found an online therapist. After the first of six sessions, the gender care counselor in London affirmed, "Yeah, you're transgender," and that gave me a sense of peace. Now I had a term for myself. Growing up in the 1970s, the only term I knew was "transsexual," and that word had no appeal for me. I live in a transgender wasteland in Southwest Louisiana, so I traveled to a gender care doctor in Beaumont, Texas to begin on estrogen in August 2020.

Having gone through that deconstruction and finally accepting myself, my faith is stronger than ever. I struggled to accept myself because of the religious "baggage." I struggled to accept myself because I believed that I was going to go to hell. I lived with Catholic guilt and Baptist judgmentalism. I sincerely believed that my salvation was at stake. After leaving the Southern Baptist Church last year, I ended up with the Presbyterian Church. I wasn't looking for another church; I was so burned out that I was looking to leave ministry altogether.

I'm not "out" publicly, so I'm out of my comfort zone today. About two months ago, my youngest child, who has always been very much like me, came out to me as transgender. I didn't know what to do with that. Thankfully, I have a good therapist and a lot of great friends who said, "Your child has somebody in her life that you never had!" I always

hid and was ashamed of who I was, but now I get to invest in my child and help her to be the woman she is supposed to be. That takes a lot of faith. When I came out to my wife, she said, "I made a mistake!" Honestly, it wasn't a mistake, because this is who I am, and now my child needs me!

## **We Can Have Religion & Spirituality**

Amy Hicox

I'm probably least qualified person on this panel to talk about religion. I'm just a regular person. Where to start? I'm binary, which is interesting. I'm transgender, so I grew up in a male role that did not fit me. Like most of the stories you've heard, I spent a lifetime hiding.

I really related to Davi's comment about wanting to grow breasts as a child and looking forward to puberty. It was the same for me. When my whiskers started to come in at age 15, I said to myself, "Oh, thank God, I'm finally going to be a man now!" But I wasn't. Some things just don't change.

But that was the pattern of a lot of my life: looking to take steps to intentionally separate myself from who I actually am. I got married and had kids at a very young age and under false pretenses, hiding who I was, my entire life.

In 2010, I had cancer, and that bomb blew up everything in my mind. When I was recovering from that, I had an epiphany, when I admitted to myself that all these years I had been trying to containerize my life, dressing in secret to make myself feel better. Why? Somehow, in that moment, I realized what really was going on: I was alleviating my dysphoria. In that moment, I admitted to myself "This is who I am!"

From there, my life started burning to the ground. I came out to my wife, and that relationship lasted only a few years.

In terms of religion, I grew up in a very conservative household. My dad would pick fights at different churches, so we went through a string of them. We were Pentecostal for a while, then we were Southern Baptist, then United Methodist, and finally Missouri Synod Lutheran by the time I left home. I knew that I didn't fit into any of that from the very beginning, but still I had this sort of guilt and shame placed on me—and these conservative cultural expectations that I didn't really buy into. The minute I left home, I turned my back on all that and considered myself an atheist for most of my adult life. Up until about 2010, in fact.

It wasn't the cancer that turned me; it was the coming out. Coming out was tragic and life shattering, and it drove me back to this language of spirituality that was given to me in my youth.

It was 2018 and my marriage was burning to the ground. My kids disowned me. My wife disowned me. My dad disowned me. It was really bad. I live in Huntsville, Alabama, and we didn't have a transgender support group at the time, so I used to drive two hours north to Nashville to attend a support group every couple of months. I met other people like me, and I made some friends there. In 2018, I was scrolling through Facebook and I saw a video of one of my friends from the support group, who gave a sermon at a church called GracePointe, which is where I go now.

Another bomb blew up in my mind. All of a sudden, all these nodes in my mind connected, and I said, "Oh, my God, trans people can belong! We can have religion! We can have a spirituality! We aren't complete outsiders to this!" That gave me permission to begin reclaiming this language of spirituality I had been born into.

I fell in love with GracePointe Church, and it's an interesting place because it's a "loosely-based church." It's mostly a club of ex-evangelicals who are deconstructing together, and that drew me in.

I came in with the hyper-vigilant self-protection I found in atheism, but I still wanted to ask deeper questions, and my life was falling apart. And I felt the need to pray! I prayed to God every night: "Please take all of this from me! I don't want to be trans! I don't want to be a woman! I just want to fit in!" I was an atheist, begging a God I thought I didn't believe in, to fix me from being the person God created me.

The language used at GracePointe drew me in, because they were creatively re-engaging with scripture. They were seeing possibilities and wonder, where I was expecting a locked door. Actually, it was pointed out a few weeks ago, in a sermon about the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, that Phillip came alongside and asked the eunuch, "Do you know what that text means?" The eunuch replied, "How could I, unless someone told me?" Then Phillip proceeded to reinterpret a passage from Isaiah in light of Jesus. He was taking his old religion and re-interpreting it!

For sure, that same approach drew me in at GracePointe. I'm deconstructing my atheism with these people and reclaiming one little bit at a time the spirituality I was given as a child!

## God Wants Us To Do Better

Dr. Megan DeFranza

Thank you for the invitation to be with you today. I'm so grateful for the work that you're doing, uncovering these lost, overlooked and marginalized texts and traditions that Judaism and the Church have. It's so important that we recover these texts and remember that being non-binary is not something new. Intersex, non-binary and trans people have been a part of the family of God from the beginning!

I am an endosex woman, which means that I am not intersex. I've never checked my chromosomes, but my biology is typically what you would expect for a female. I'm a cisgender woman, and I am an ally. I am a Christian theologian, raised in White evangelical churches. I received my graduate degree from Gordon-Conwell, a White Evangelical seminary, then earned my Ph.D. in theology and religion from Marquette University, a Roman Catholic, Jesuit University.

A very pious Evangelical, I was baptized in the Southern Baptist Church then attended a lot of non-denominational Bible churches. I didn't know how to serve Jesus without accidentally sinning because I was born as a girl and, in my church tradition, that was a problem. With gifts of teaching, I felt called to theology and philosophy, and I thought, "What do I do with this?" It felt like God had made me wrong. I wrestled with the fact that girls weren't doing what I did.

As a result of my dissatisfaction with theological reflections on the right and left—neither made sense of my experience as a pious Evangelical woman—I decided to study gender and sex differences from a theological perspective. My dissertation was published as a book, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female and Intersex in the Image of God*. It identifies the similarities between Evangelical theology about gender and Roman Catholic theology of the body. The book unpacks in more detail some of the texts Reverend Michelangelo shared with us today, and it brings evangelical and Roman Catholic theological reflections on biological sex differences, gender and sexuality into conversation with each other. I examine Christian history and show how sex and gender have been talked about very differently at different points in time and how intersex people are acknowledged in Scripture and in Eastern and Western theological traditions. Unfortunately, while Christians in the past were familiar with the fact that not all people are male or female, this knowledge has been lost to most of us in the Church until recent years.



I want to raise one point which hasn't yet been articulated today. It's really important that we're careful to differentiate between sex and gender. A person can have a non-binary sex[ed body] and/or a non-binary gender [identity]. Not everyone who identifies their gender as non-binary has a non-binary body. Not everyone who has a non-binary body identifies with a non-binary gender. I raise this point because I've seen intersex people who have been marginalized in conversations with trans and non-binary folk; and trans and non-binary people have also been marginalized by intersex people. We need to be careful with our language. I have a dear friend and colleague, Anunnaki Ray Marquez, who was raised Catholic and is intersex. He identifies as a man; his gender identity is male. He was assigned female at birth, but he always knew he was male. Later in life, he discovered that he is intersex. His sex is intersex, and his gender is male. For him and for others, it is more complex than adding a third gender option on a driver's license or passport. People with non-binary gender identities and non-binary bodies regularly experience harassment when they go through security at the airport with documents that don't match their bodies. A third gender marker is a great step forward but it is not a solution for everyone.

In addition to books and articles on these topics, I produced the documentary "Stories of Intersex and Faith." Adding my theological teaching to excerpts from the documentary, I then created a six-week video curriculum for churches and small groups, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: Scripture and the New Science of Gender." You can find out more about my writings, documentary and curriculum on my website: [www.megandefranza.com](http://www.megandefranza.com).

Thank you for inviting me, and thank you for your stories, which just break my heart. I know that God wants us to do better!

**Reflections on  
Beyond the Church & Society of Yesteryear:  
Non-binary Theology & Experience**

Brohl: I am blown away. I'm very impressed by your willingness to reveal yourselves to a bunch of strangers. I was born male, I've lived my entire life as male, and one of my children came to me as non-binary about eight months ago. I had never heard the word. I'm trying to be respectful of her view of herself, and I'm having a lot of difficulty referring to her in terms that she's comfortable with—in terms that I'm very uncomfortable with. Do you have any suggestions on how I can get over that hump?

D'Arrigo: Your child knows that she has introduced something to you that is hard. She is not looking for perfection overnight. She just wants you to try. I suggest referring to your child by name, rather than by pronouns. It will take time for you to get used to using different pronouns for her.

Plemmons: People said that, that my pronoun was my first name.

Grace: Show yourself some grace. I was talking to my youngest the other day when, out of habit, I said, "Bye, dude." I quickly sent a text to apologize, and she understood. Show yourself some grace. It's a growing process, and we're in it together.

Hayes: As a child of someone who completely rejected me for coming out as gay and non-binary, I say that your child is lucky to have you. You're asking the right questions.

Hicox: I can say what it's like on the other side, when people misgender me or use my old name. My mother accepts me, though she struggles, and my father relentlessly used my old name and pronouns when I came out to him four years ago. We can judge intent. We know who's trying to hurt us, and who isn't. We know who's trying to validate us and who's trying to invalidate us—and it's easy to let go of "slips."

Plemmons: It's easy to beat ourselves up when we're just acting out of habit. My suggestion is not to make a big deal of it. When you say the wrong gender, simply restate it with the correct

gender. Don't make a deal of it that they'll have to emotionally deal with later.

L. Walker: It's so important to hear your voices. This is a hot-button issue politically and in our communities. Much of what I've learned about this issue has occurred during the past two years. Thank you for your honesty!

Bozek: Thank you, friends, for sharing your stories and journeys. There is so much grace in each of your stories. You recognize the divine encounters in your lives, and you share your pain and hurt. In the seminary, we learn that healing and reconciliation cannot begin until guilt is acknowledged. I cannot speak for the Vatican or for other churches, but as a cisgender Catholic priest, I beg your forgiveness. We have wronged you. Please find grace in your hearts to slowly forgive us over time, and never stop teaching us. Never stop gracing us by living your lives in true integrity!

Aguillard: I'm 76, so I don't know what new terms to use of myself, but I'm so glad that you all are talking about this. I have never differentiated all these different categories that we have now. My neighbors asked their child at age four whether the child wanted to be a boy or girl. I'm going to visit Megan's website, so that I can get the terminology straight and so that I don't stick my foot in my mouth! We should have more conversations like this.

Vanni: Thank you for your incredible generosity of educating other people. I don't take that for granted, particularly when the education of many different communities can be so profoundly burdensome. As Marek said, that is heartbreaking—but it was also life-giving to hear your stories. They witness to the abuse of the Church, and they also witness to the power of God. I'm a cisgendered woman, I have been an activist for decades in the Roman Catholic community, and I remain committed to being a very present and vocal ally. I've also taken on the work of educating myself. The ECC invited my friend, Vic, who is non-binary and an expert on issues related to gender and mental health, to share a presentation on the ways in which our language of prayers affects people. Vic did an amazing job of unpacking the effect of such phrases as "sisters and brothers" on those with whom we pray. I appreciate Mir's

words about being patient with ourselves. We all stumble. Even I stumbled when I introduced Vic as “her,” rather than use their pronouns. Like Marek, I repent of what the Roman Catholic community has done. I made a commitment 20 years ago to live as if I am personally responsible for the Roman Catholic Church—so I repent of and apologize for the Church’s actions. I know that many of us here are committed to creating spaces that transform that which used to beat down and burden people. That’s our commitment. Thank you all for enriching us!

Aguillard: What are some other options for us, in place of “sisters and brothers”?

Grace: I always ended my services with “sons and daughters of God.” Now I say, “beloved of God.” Let’s remind people that they are God’s beloved!

Hayes: “Siblings” is always a good route, too.

Carter: Thank you for being here today, and thank you for being yourselves. Bless you for all the good that you’re doing. We very much appreciate it. I am appreciating Dr. Lee Airton’s book, *Gender: Your Guide*, which was given to me by a friend with a non-binary child.

Quintana: I have fallen in love with all of you and your stories. I just want you to know that I love you, and I lift you up in prayer.

Robison: Thank you for coming and sharing your very important stories. One of my godsons is trans and is preparing to undergo some bariatric surgery. I wish he could have been here to hear you all!

D’Arrigo: I am pretty “out” as intersex, especially in the world of Extraordinary Catholics, and I would say that I’m an advocate—but you may not know my story. I grew up in New York City, and we moved to Long Island right before middle school. I went to the first experiential middle school in the country, where we didn’t have walls or desks, and where we called our teachers by their first names. By the time I was in eighth grade, I was pretty sure I wasn’t straight. I went through puberty in the fourth grade, but I didn’t know much about my body. In the eighth grade, I had a little peach-fuzz mustache. I liked boys, and I kind of

liked girls. I related to girls in ways that I didn't relate to boys. My family kicked me out of the house, so I lived with my paternal grandmother for six months. She died at age 103. When I was 13, I began playing guitar professionally, and I had an ID that said that I was 23. So playing rock and roll led me to a very sexually-active and spiritually and physically unhealthy life. I contracted mono and, as part of the blood tests, discovered that I am XXY. Dr. Thomas told me that I was a genetic mutant, and that I would never meet anyone else with this condition. My mother looked at the doctor, then looked at me and said, "Well, it's good that we didn't know about this before you were born—because I probably would have aborted you!" At age 16, I didn't find that helpful. We don't know how many people are born with chromosomal variations because so many of us learn about it much later in life.

Plemmons: Take a second to consider that: Michelangelo and I could have been aborted. I have seen data from Canada that states some 90% of intersex babies are aborted.

D'Arrigo: For years, I was out as bisexual, and I was an advocate in the LGBT community. There was no LGBTQIA+ "alphabet soup" at the time. I thought I was a mutant, that there was something wrong with me, and I had to do everything in my power to quash it. I went through seminary and never disclosed this to anyone. I was ordained. I got married, which ended very shortly after that. Through social media, I've met a massive intersex community that now gathers and has conferences. We now recognize that you're as likely to be born with an XY chromosomal variation than to be born with red hair. I wish my doctor had shared that statistic with me when I was 16! As Independent Catholics, we know how diverse God's creation is, we're willing to ask tough questions, and we dig into the historical context of the scriptures. Any time I hear someone deny the existence of non-binary and transgender people, or who insist that we're broken and weren't born this way, I say, "How long have you known me? I am fearfully, wonderfully made. God made me this way, and God has a plan for me. How dare you limit God's creation! You respected me before this conversation; if you lose respect for me, that's on you."

Plemmons: Non-binary people have shown tremendous power: One eunuch rallied 30 men to save Jeremiah from the cistern (Jer. 38:7-13)! Please take under advisement anything that you're thinking that could be demeaning, and stop judging people by the size or presence of this or that body part!

Hayes: Let's share the message that all people are loved and cherished by God. That is really the point of my entire ministry. Let's continue to bear witness to each other's experiences, the pains and the joys!

Grace: One of the greatest lessons for us is that we're not alone. Amy mentioned Jennifer: Before I met Jennifer, I thought I was the only transgender pastor in the world. Since then I've met other amazing friends with whom I share so much in common. We get beaten up and beaten down by those who think they're speaking on God's behalf. Let's stick together through thick and thin, and remember that we are God's beloved!

Hicox: I was especially struck by the eight different genders in the Jewish tradition. Too often, we prefer synthetic perfection over realism. We prefer vector drawings and clipart to photographs. We prefer abstract, idealized shapes to reality. God's creation is so intricate and ever-evolving, and we live inside a system that never stops making new kinds of lives. Let's remember that to embrace gender diversity is to embrace God!

DeFranza: I'm so grateful and honored to be among you, and, as an ally, I offer myself for those conversations and spaces, especially those very conservative spaces, that might be too painful for you to go into. That's a privilege I have as a cisgender, straight woman. Please reach out to me if there's any way I can support you as an ally.

D'Arrigo: It's a process, and it's all about *agape*, love. So, cut yourself slack, take care of yourself, and take care of those around you!

## **How to Respond? Inclusive Catholic Apologetics in 2022**

**Rev. Joseph Dang**

**Mathias:** For quite some time, Father Joseph Dang has said that we need to do develop an Inclusive Catholic apologetics within our movement, to deflect the arrows that are sometimes launched in our direction. This evening, we have a chance to reflect on the arrows that have come in our direction. So many questions arise in such situations: Should we engage? How? What are we communicating if we choose to ignore detractors? The words and actions of detractors affect people in our communities, causing us to take them more seriously. Please join me in welcoming Father Joseph Dang!

**Dang:** Most of us have likely had the experience of being attacked, and those who enjoy our ministries sooner or later face questions. How have we responded when the Roman Church or other denominations attack us, especially when they print things about us? How do we respond when they call us “fake” Catholics or “fake” priests? Let’s ask Father Jayme first, then Father Marek. Father Marek and I came from the same diocese, and I cried when I saw how the Roman Church treated him. How do you both respond when fingers point at you and when people shun you? Do you fight back, or do you stay quiet and walk away?

**Mathias:** We have a larger community here in Austin, Texas, and I received a call from a parishioner as recently as three days ago, saying that a local Roman Catholic parish was not accepting our baptism certificates. Any of us who have studied even a bit of sacramental theology know that there should be no reason for any Roman Catholic parish not to accept our baptisms if performed with water in the name of the Trinity. In such instances, I always respond. I pick up the phone and ask to speak with those who talk about us and/or our sacraments. I’ve also been known to show up unannounced at Roman Catholic parishes and ask to speak with the pastor. It’s important for me to have all the information, so we developed a form in our parish, so that our parish administrator can record all the details of such

encounters: the name and contact information of the complainant, the name, parish and contact information of the person giving them trouble. Local parishes have learned not to poke this bear!

Božek: Our situation was slightly unusual: St. Stanislaus had been a Roman Catholic parish for more than 100 years, before it ceased to be Roman Catholic in December 2005. For the longest time, it was confusing for people, and we made several conscientious efforts to come to a place where people no longer felt the need to self-identify as Roman Catholic. Our formal excommunication by Cardinal Burke and all the media attention certainly helped in this respect. We put on the homepage of our website and on our sacrament registration forms a note that St. Stanislaus is not a Roman Catholic parish and that our sacraments may not be recognized by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese or by Roman Catholic clergy. We no longer have problems. We do not pretend to be a Roman Catholic parish, and we don't need to justify our existence to our siblings down the street or in the chancery. If you do an internet search for Catholic churches in our neighborhood, we'll come up, and we have visitors who will come to St. Stanislaus and who enjoy the beauty of our sanctuary and everything else—but once they see Mother Annie presiding or Deacon Donna preaching, they are shocked that we are not a Roman Catholic church. Once in a while, they are so offended and scandalized that they walk out during mass. The two-foot letters outside the church clearly state that we are St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Parish. I don't know what else I can do to clarify that we are not Roman Catholic. When I greet and welcome newcomers, I always ask them, "Are you aware that we are a Polish Catholic church and that we are not part of the Archdiocese?" If they are Roman Catholic, I tell them, "We are happy to have you, but please know that we believe in A, B and C." That is usually appreciated. Very seldom will people walk away. The biggest challenge is to own who we are and to say, "We respect you, but we are not part of your structure. You are not our bishop, and we wish you the best." Like Vietnamese people, Polish people have Catholic DNA. It can be shocking for some to see same-sex marriage in a Catholic Church, or a woman preacher fully vested at the



altar. We own these elements and clearly state them aloud, and then the burden lies with the other person.

Dang: Many of us have probably heard words like, “You’re confusing [Roman] Catholics!” “You’re confusing the faithful!” “You are not a [Roman] Catholic, and you don’t belong to the Archdiocese!” Are we confusing people?

Vanni: We need to always ask: Who sets the terms of the conversation? Jayme and Marek were both diocesan priests in good standing. They come from a world where the word “Catholic” can only be used with the approval of the bishop. The Church universal is catholic. I have a holy, high Lutheran friend who describes himself as Catholic. We must ask: Who owns the “Catholic” language? The idea of “misleading the faithful” is such a Roman Catholic notion! It’s so destructive, and it leads to the long lists of litanies that Roman Catholics have to adhere to if they want to work for the church. We saw these crop up a lot in the early 2000s. Clergy, teachers and even liturgical ministers in some places have to sign statements of orthodoxy or receive a “purity certificate.” We need to be able to graciously say that those things that we could otherwise parse and place our energy in don’t apply outside Roman Catholic walls!

Ellis: Trish is spot-on. This is an issue of language and boundaries. Whose problem is this? It’s not really our problem. It’s theirs. They can choose to fix it. In some cases, they underestimate the savvy of their parishioners, which is hugely patronizing. I don’t mean to differ with Father Marek, but I don’t think it’s his responsibility to make sure that people understand that they’re not in a Roman Catholic parish. They walked into *your* house! You didn’t walk into their home; you’re not knocking on their door. If they have questions, they’ll ask, but we don’t have to do their work for them.

Dang: We often hear talk of the validity and liceity of our sacraments. I’m sick and tired of hearing it. “He’s fake, and his sacraments are invalid!”

Leary: Our Episcopal bishop here has been very honest about it. He says, “Your sacraments are valid, but you’re not in full communion with the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire.” That’s his way to dance around it.

Cheasty: Our ordinations are consistent with the Catholic understanding of ordinations, so they're often simply playing verbal gymnastics in an attempt to make people think that we're not legit. I tell people that it's a contradiction for Rome not to accept our lines of apostolic succession or the validity of our sacraments: Those issues were settled a long time ago!

Božek: It's important that we understand that terms like "valid" and "licit" have a meaning only in the context and within the framework of Roman Catholic canon law. Roman Catholics are not lying when they say that our sacraments are illicit: According to their framework, they're 100% correct. They also say that the sacraments of women are invalid. We don't operate within that framework, and we do not allow them to impose that on us. We cannot win if we play the game according to their rules and vocabulary!

Cheasty: I look at them and ask, "Where is the legitimacy of your arguments? If the sacrament of Holy Orders is performed by a duly-consecrated bishop, those ordinations are valid!"

Božek: According to the way in which Roman Catholic canon law is interpreted, the *episcopi vagantes* in the U.S. today are not validly-consecrated bishops. If you are ordained by a non-Roman Catholic bishop, you are not validly ordained—according to Roman Catholic canon law. Do we really want to play by their rules?

Frame: We've made fantastic leaps during the last ten years, and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion is now the first independent sacramental church to be part of the National Council of Churches. In Florida, Bishop Chuck Leahy served as president of the Florida Council of Churches. I now get invitations from Lutherans who refer to us as "the cool Catholics."

Quintana: As Father Marek points out, we'll never be "licit" under Roman Catholic canon law. In my files, I have an article from the *Denver Catholic Register* that states my ordination by Bishop Robert Schuyler Zeiger as an Independent Catholic priest is valid. There are two ways of looking at consecrations and ordinations. The Augustinian view focuses on "unbroken" lines of apostolic succession as a

“Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,” but the Cypriatic view suggests that our faith must agree with the faith of the Church. Why should we be worried about whether or not others accept or approve of us? Let’s tell people: “According to the Roman Catholic Church, we may not be valid—but we’re not subject to Roman Catholic canon law!”

Dang: Very few people understand canon law.

Quintana: Presuming people aren’t attacking us from a canonical or Cypriatic point of view, we might more simply say, “We’re not part of them, and we don’t play by their rules, but, yes, our sacraments are valid.”

Vanni: Focusing on Roman Catholicism—what Jayme refers to as the “supertanker” in the Catholic Sea—eats up our energy. Our focus might better be on the pastoral question: How do I support people and help them pray? How do I build a positive thing, rather than be on the defensive. When people ask me about our sacraments, I try to be light about it. I say, “Well, of course: The Archdiocese will also say you shouldn’t go to communion at a Lutheran, Presbyterian or Episcopalian church. We’re not Roman Catholic, but here’s what we are...” I don’t see what I’m doing as dissent within the Roman Catholic Church. Unlike the Roman Catholic Womenpriests who very profoundly embrace the word “Roman” to visibly dissent, I see myself as part of a new thing that is emerging from the American national Catholic experience. I’m imagining that those of us who were not ordained by the Roman Catholic Church cause less feelings of being betrayed, less angst, less parental need to slap our hands!

Brohl: It’s entirely appropriate that Independent Catholic communities identify that they are not in communion with Rome. So much of what we do—our practice, our governance, our liturgy, our claims to apostolic succession and valid sacraments—is Roman Catholic, which is why I don’t understand why we don’t call ourselves Independent Roman Catholic. What effect would that have on Rome? Would it be perceived as antagonistic? Also, how can people assert that Independent Catholic bishops are invalid, according to the Roman Catholic Church, but that the

bishops consecrated by Roman Catholic archbishop Emmanuel Milingo are not?

Božek: Many of us have read and may even have on our websites references to *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration from when Ratzinger was the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which speaks of the valid sacraments and valid apostolic succession of some non-Roman churches—and we assume that we qualify as part of those “valid” churches with “valid” lineage. That document applies to the Union of Utrecht and the Polish National Catholic Church. It also applies to Milingo and the bishops he consecrated—but it does not apply to the bishops consecrated by those bishops. Independent Catholic bishops who claim a lineage that is 25 “generations” removed from the Roman Catholic Church are not considered validly-consecrated by the Vatican or by Roman Catholic canon law. It’s a brutal reality, and we must ask ourselves: As men, why do we desire to be considered “validly” ordained or consecrated in Rome’s eyes when Rome refuses to recognize the validity of women priests, non-male priests, and non-binary priests? I prefer to be in solidarity with my sisters and with non-binary priests and bishops, than to be in solidarity with Rome! I will no longer play by Roman Catholic rules. Theologically speaking, do you really believe that the Sunday communion services in Episcopal churches, the United Church of Christ, the Methodist Church, or even the Baptist Communion are any less sacred or holy than in a Roman Catholic cathedral? The UCC will never claim apostolic succession, as we do, but when you pray with those communities, do you believe in your heart of hearts that the mystery of faith and the experience of the Divine is any less than in a Roman Catholic cathedral? If a UCC parish calls me to be their pastor tomorrow, I will happily become their pastor, and I will celebrate the sacraments the way that they celebrate the sacraments. Until we order and organize ourselves and establish our own rules and canons, we give others power when we play on their turf, by their rules, and with their vocabulary.

Brohl: Are you suggesting that we should not claim lines of apostolic succession or valid sacraments?

- Božek: No Independent Catholic clergy or community should claim that “even the Vatican recognizes us as valid!” That’s a lie. To put *Dominus Iesus* on your website confuses people, as Joseph says some accuse us of doing. Like our LGBT siblings, we need to own the “queerness” of who we are. It can be a blessing! For the sake of our non-male clergy, who will never be considered “valid” by the Roman Church, let’s stop playing their game.
- Quintana: Not even Rome can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it possesses an unbroken line of apostolic succession. It’s part of their sacred myth!
- Vanni: My presentation yesterday cited a book that very artfully talks about all of the breaks in apostolic succession. A wonderful preaching professor said to me, “All stories are true, and some of them really happened.” This idea that there is a continuity to the very beginning is true...and it didn’t happen in the way in which it’s been reified. It’s a myth in the best sense of the word.
- Quintana: Years ago, whenever you met an Independent Catholic priest or bishop, the very first thing they did was whip out their lines of apostolic succession. It just made me sick. Either we’re going to recognize each other’s priesthood, or we’re not. Let’s stop playing this game. We’re wasting too much time and energy. Let’s get on with being deacons, priests and bishops. Let’s do the work. Not even Rome can prove its “apostolic succession” or the validity of its clergy or sacraments. What gives them the imperial ability to judge others? If we do the work of Matthew 25, we are priests!
- D’Arrigo I have a unique background: I was ordained by the Worldwide Anglican Communion, so I’m not the least bit worried about apostolic succession. The Church of England was one of the first “Independent Catholic” churches to say, “Screw you, Rome.” Despite the lovely relationship between Justin Welby and Pope Francis, the Roman Church will not recognize my priesthood. The Anglican Communion has been a separate church for an inordinately long period of time, and they’re no closer to a re-merger with the Roman Church. Does that invalidate the Archbishop of Canterbury? Does it invalidate all the bishops, priests and deacons throughout the Anglican Communion in every nation and

on every continent? That doesn't stop the Anglican Communion. We don't receive our validation from Rome. We receive it from the work we do and the service we provide. We receive it by caring for widows and orphans, by looking after our homeless populations. Providing the gospel in our communities should create all the validation we need! When people see our love, they will acknowledge us as a living, breathing church in their community, even if Rome does not. In terms of an apologetic, which is what this conversation is about, the best thing that we can say to people is: Look at how I love this community? Is my love invalid? Or does my love in some way look like Christ's love? If someone wants to argue with you, you don't need them in your parish anyway.

Robison: I've never had to deal with Rome. It's mostly snobby evangelicals who say that I'm not a real minister. In my area, Rome is in so much trouble that it generally keeps its head down. The archbishop is as popular as ants at a picnic

Dang: I recently attended mass with community leaders at a Vietnamese Roman Catholic church, to commemorate the fall of Saigon. Before communion, the priest announced that only those in true, prefect union with Rome should receive communion, so I decided not to participate. Later, the president of the Vietnamese community asked, "You're Catholic. Why didn't you receive communion?" I responded, "I am Catholic, but that priest was obviously singling me out, and I didn't want to give him an opportunity to make a scene. The best thing for me to do was not to participate."

Rounds: I wasn't Roman Catholic, but I grew up in a Roman Catholic community back in the day, when Protestants couldn't go into Roman Catholic churches, and Roman Catholics couldn't go into Protestant churches. I learned about Roman Catholicism from my girlfriend. Years later, during a trip to Rome, I wanted to receive communion at a Roman Catholic church. I was terrified. A former priest told me how to take communion, and I decided to fake it. I thought something bad would happen. I was tremendously disappointed: I had been brainwashed into thinking that Roman Catholic communion is a magical thing, like nothing else, but it was exactly the same as what I received in my Episcopal church.

I agree with Marek: Communion is communion, and the communion of all churches is a participation in the Divine.

Dang: Some couples ask me if they can receive communion because they “live in sin,” they live together but aren’t married by the Roman Church. I joke with them: “I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, and the first thing I learned is that it’s a religion of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’! No, you’re not going to go to hell for receiving communion.”

Ellis: Roman Catholic canon law specifically speaks to the validity of all sacraments, but, like the body of commentary on the Supreme Court’s comments and attempts to interpret law, there’s dissent among Roman Catholic canonists. It’s important for us to entertain the possibility that some interpretations are wrong. In theory, canon law follows theology, not the other way around. The priesthood doesn’t belong to the Church; it’s not the Church’s to give. Augustine said, the priesthood belongs to Christ. That’s why once you have it, the Church cannot take it away! Believe me: The Church would take it away if it could, but it recognizes that its hands are tied. Instead, the Church invokes the Holy Spirit in its rites, asking that the Holy Spirit come upon the candidate for ordination and give them that which the Church cannot provide. From a theological standpoint, it’s important to have a coherent theology—and law is not always coherent with lived experience, theological and otherwise. There has always been a tension between the magisterium and the lived experience of Catholic faithful, and they correct each other. Jesus says, “Where two or three are gathered together” – regardless of the religious setting or lines of apostolic succession – he is present. It creates an incoherent theology to suggest that Jesus will only be present if there is a true representative of the bishop of Rome present! There’s a theology that undergirds every sacrament.

Dang: That raises the Roman Catholic Church’s argument that Jesus gave Peter the “keys.” That’s part of their apologetic.

Ellis: Of course, I disagree with that claim. Suggesting that Catholics have to submit to the pope is analogous to suggesting that Christians have to submit to circumcision. Certainly, we espouse the faith of the apostles, which is the catholic faith. The apostles and martyrs of the early Church

didn't submit to circumcision, and they didn't submit to the bishop of Rome. To speak of Peter's "keys" is a specious argument, one that cannot be taken seriously from a theological standpoint—though we know that some people do take it seriously.

**Cheasty:** Whether you receive sacraments, such as the Eucharist, is between you and God. My father was Roman Catholic, so we celebrated his funeral with a Catholic mass at the local Roman Catholic church. At the time, I was a United Methodist pastor, and the church was filled with United Methodists, and when it came time for communion, the whole congregation received communion. There was no objection, from the priest celebrating the mass, to serving Holy Communion to all who came to receive, Roman Catholic or United Methodist. At a certain point, we have to use our own judgment. We need to look at the sacraments and say, "It's between you and God."

**D'Arrigo:** The pope is the bishop of Rome, and I'm happy for him. I'd be happy to be in an ecumenical dialogue with him, but he is simply one bishop in the worldwide Church. Concerning the question of the "keys," many scripture scholars now believe that Jesus was not talking about building the Church on the "rock" of Peter, but on that physical place where they were speaking, at a mountain crag on the way to Caesarea Philippi that belched sulfur and was known as the Gate of Hades due to the lava flow beneath it. Jews avoided that uncultured place, where Pan was worshiped with sexual orgies.

**Dang:** I'm wondering how we might equip our seminarians with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to questions about who we are and what we do. I'll be the first to admit that I wasn't sufficiently prepared for the attacks of the "wolves" that have come in my direction. Before I buy a product, I want to feel good about that product. How can we help our seminarians to better know the "product" of Independent Catholicism?

**Furr:** If someone has entered a seminary in the Independent Catholic movement, they have already made the decision that this may be right for them. When someone attacks me, I choose how I will respond to that attack. I'll likely say, "God



bless you. Thank you for your perspective.” And I’ll walk away. We do not have to stand in front of the firing squad. If someone attacks me being a woman priest, for instance, that’s their problem. I’m very comfortable with who I am, and I don’t have to enter into a lower vibrational energy in an attempt to explain who I am or to apologize. We waste a lot of time and energy responding. Jesus never felt the need to engage detractors. Those who criticized him could receive his blessing or not. When people come to our communities, they can choose to stay because it resonates with them and because they’re being fed by our love and energy, or they can find another church. I don’t need to explain myself to Rome or anyone. When I left my religious community and was laicized, I had to write a letter to Rome and explain why I wanted to leave the congregation. I basically said, “It’s none of your business.” We were done, and I didn’t feel the need to explain myself to Rome anymore. That may sound arrogant or snarky, but I had decided that I would no longer tolerate abuse by any religious group. We have to teach our seminaries to stand in that personal authority and power. We don’t need to teach them to share an “apologetic” on why we’re valid. I *am* valid, and I don’t care if anyone says differently.

Dang: What concrete actions might we take to increase our personal credibility and the credibility of our movement? When Roman Catholic dioceses and archdioceses publish and say things that affect our ministry, do we just “brush it off,” as Reverend Karen suggests, or at what point do we stand up to the bully? I remember when the local Vietnamese Roman Catholic parish published in its bulletin that I am a “fake priest.” Boiling, I dialed the chancellor and threatened a lawsuit. Is that what we need to do, or do we just be quiet?

Rounds: I’ll return to the question about how we prepare our seminarians. In the Church of Antioch, the first class taken by our students in Sophia Divinity School is on Independent Catholicism. We equip them with information on our movement, including our background and history, and they can determine if this is the right thing for them. We also pair them with mentors, and we build a family, so that they know that when things happen, they’re not alone.

Božek: In American English, we have the expression that we're "talking about apples and oranges." We're talking about different things here: Canonical language is very precise and clearly defines the structure of a singular denomination, and theological language transcends denominations and is not bound by those clearly-defined terms. We will never win canonical arguments with people of other churches. If someone asks if we are valid priests, our answer is simple: We are valid priests in our church, in our community, or in our parish! That's all that people need to know. We are not playing in their backyard anymore. I find it interesting that, as Jayme repeatedly points out, the largest group within the Independent Sacramental Movement, with perhaps some seven million members, does not call itself Catholic. They call themselves the Philippine Independent Church. This may be heretical for Polish and Irish communities—but perhaps we need to stop calling ourselves Catholic in name. It removes all the unnecessary drama. The Presbyterian Church, Episcopal Church, Methodist Church and UCC say the same creed as us, but they don't feel the need to call themselves Catholic. They know how bullish and hateful the Roman Catholic Church can be! Maybe our Filipino siblings got it right. If we were to remove that adjective from our name, we might squelch the constant fighting and solve a lot of problems. I agree with Karen that we do not have to allow ourselves to be victims. We can choose to walk away. Nobody has a right to diminish or bully us. We have an obligation to protect ourselves. We don't have to be the victims or martyrs of bullish, crazy people! I don't see a need for me to step inside a Roman Catholic church until my mother's funeral. I wouldn't think of going to a Roman Catholic church when I'm on vacation: If there's not an Independent Catholic parish, I'll go to an Episcopal church or UCC church. Why would I want to go to a church that calls me "inherently disordered"? Why would I want to go to a place that believes that my sister is only half-worthy or that affirms only half of humanity?

Ellis: In terms of preparing seminarians, all ministry is founded in prayer, and each seminarian has a story. They need to be able to articulate that story. We can take the gloves off in these conversations, and we can be edgy and sharp, but there is

actually a pastoral dimension to this conversation: When people say things to and about us, the first thing we need to do is stay out of our own personal place about it. We need to do our own inner work. We need to reframe situations to see how people are really asking for more information. If someone were to ask me if I'm a "valid" or "real" priest, I'd likely respond: "I asked Jesus the very same thing. I had that very same conversation with Jesus when He called me to the priesthood, and it was a long conversation! And it opened up my heart and mind, and I'm so glad he had that conversation with me because I love being one of his priests every day!" These are really occasions for evangelization, and when we soften it, no one can argue with our relationship with the Lord.

Quintana: Let's not worry about Rome, and let's form our seminarians in such a way that they are confident in their ministry and don't have to seek after the approbation of other churches or denominations. Relax: Rome has no ability to take away your priesthood or your ministry. If we're doing the work, we shouldn't care what others say. Are people "invalidly" fed or clothed? Are the ill and imprisoned "invalidly" visited? Do the work, love Jesus and others, and be confident in what you're doing!

Cheasty: I tend to look at this issue and ask: Why is Rome or the Roman Catholic Church threatened by us? Why do we "rattle their cage" so much? We deviate from the hierarchical understanding shared by so many Roman Catholics, that everything comes down from the pope, and that we grievously sin against God and Rome if we deviate from that. And since we challenge the supreme authority of the pope and the polity of the Roman Catholic Church, we are considered to be "imposters".

I recall going to see Mother Teresa who came to speak at the Greensboro Coliseum in North Carolina, I went with members of my congregation and, as their pastor, I wore my collar. A snarky priest approached me and asked, "What are you doing here, Mother? Or should I call you 'Father'?" I replied, "I thought I would listen to Mother Teresa, if that's okay with you. Have a good day!" I was not going to engage him in his insecurities. When we consider the motivations of

others, it's easier for us to not engage. We need to shake off some of the negative things, rather than allow them to take up residence inside us.

I think it is helpful, for those of us who were raised in the Roman Catholic Church, to reflect on how to effectively deal with the pain of being marginalized by a Church that holds an important place in our lives. As a woman, I am marginalized. There is no place for me within the Roman church to answer my call to ministry. There's a certain amount of pain in recognizing that my home church, the church of my childhood, has no place for me and sees me as "other." Those of you who are LGBTQ know that experience of marginalization by the Roman Catholic Church. I presume that you, too, carry pain as a result of that rejection. It is more than time for those of us who are marginalized by the Roman church to define ourselves in the context of who we are as children of God, called by God to the priesthood. Christ has called us: We need to respond only to his call!

Robison: Let the dead bury their dead. Rome has no say or hold over us. Shake the dust from your sandals. Nothing you say will pierce the overwhelming arrogance of the Roman Church. Nothing will get through to them. Even if Jesus could reach out of the host and slap the pope, he would still insist on his infallibility. It's a wretched, rotten, sick institution, and I'm tired of them acting like they did toward Father Marek. I disagree with dropping the word "Catholic" from our identity, because that's giving in to the bullies. If they want to be nasty, let them be nasty. We shake the dust from our feet, we move on, and we allow God's judgment to be upon them.

Aguillard: One of our "think tanks" a few months ago focused on this issue, and I couldn't believe that Roman Catholic dioceses and archdiocese were badmouthing us. I had to look at those websites myself. When I saw their comments, I wrote them a letter telling them how tacky their words seemed to me. I asked: Are you going to start badmouthing synagogues and other Christian denominations, too? It's ridiculous. It's bigoted. I just want to say to them: "I think you've got to work on yourself!"

- Carter: "Jesus entered the temple courts, and while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked, 'and who gave you this authority?' Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism: Where did it come from? Was it from heaven? Or of human origin?' They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say from heaven, he will ask "then why didn't you believe me?" But if we say of human origin, we are afraid of the people. For they all hold that John was a prophet.' They answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Then he said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority, I am doing these things'" (Mt. 21:23-27). Let's not worry about the accusations of the "chief priests" and "elders." Our authority does not come from Rome. Our authority comes from God and the people we serve.
- Božek: When Jayme and I were in Utrecht three weeks ago, we learned that Utrecht considers it a heresy not to ordain women. We also learned that bishops without churches make no sense. There are many less-valid ministries than ours: The Roman Catholic Church has plenty of bishops who have never been pastors and who have no pastoral experience. They are diplomats and apostolic nuncios. They are less valid ministers than any of you here!
- Vanni: I'll end with a practical suggestion: Join your local ministerial organization and get involved with ecumenical and interfaith activities. There's a certain credibility by association. Interestingly, we often receive more respect from our United Methodist and ELCA colleagues, and, because they have plowed the field a little longer than we have, we're able to have different conversations.
- Cheasty: Our ordinations within the Independent Sacramental Movement are consistent with the Roman Catholic requirement for apostolic succession, in order to have a valid ordination. Rome, for reasons of its own, is contradicting itself in an attempt to delegitimize our ordinations, to challenge the validity of the apostolic succession that we claim, and ultimately the legitimacy of the sacraments we celebrate.

Dang: I'm damn proud to be a priest and to respond to God's call in my life. When the Roman Church limits people, let's show people that they are unlimited. When the Roman Church says no, let's say yes!

Mathias: When it comes to apologetics, it seems our task is to practice ecclesial jiu-jitsu, reflecting and redirecting the energy that comes in our direction. We need to practice the fantastic *qinggong* maneuvers of Wuxia warriors who dance around the "swords" and "bullets" thrown at them. People's words and actions tell us a lot about them. Let's use that "information" to continue to grow and strengthen our ministries and our movement!

**Faith & Fandom:  
A Conversation with Independent Catholic Geeks**

Rev. Brett Banks  
Very Rev. Scott Carter  
Rev. Mir Plemmons  
Rev. John Robison

Banks: During my undergraduate studies and seminary formation, I enjoyed connecting theology and theological ideas with the themes and ideas of popular culture – like Star Wars! I’ll invite our panelists to tell us about their connection to fandom and pop culture.

Robison: I am a priest in the nerd or ecosphere. I serve as the chaplain for two science fiction fandom organizations, and I celebrate the Eucharist at local sci-fi conventions. I’m more a fan of fantasy than science fiction, and I tend to gravitate towards stories that involve the personal faith journeys of characters

Plemmons: I have been a chaplain in fandom, which is the word for the geek community. I joke that my “parish” is 3,000 geeks along 300 miles of the I-5 corridor. I have ministered at Cons, science fiction and fantasy conventions, from Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia, down into Oregon, and out to Spokane, Washington and Moscow, Idaho. I work with an unofficial chaplain in a medieval living history group called the Society for Creative Anachronism. I also do disaster chaplaincy and chaplaincy within the queer and gay communities, who often bear a lot of Church-caused wounds. I gather with other chaplains – mostly hospital chaplains – for gaming and roleplaying games, like D&D [Dungeons and Dragons]. There’s a large geek community among clergy, and yet there don’t seem to be many clergy who minister to geeks. That’s our niche!

Carter: I don’t consider myself a geek or nerd, or an expert of any kind, but I am excited by popular culture and the weird, sometimes-forgotten corners within popular culture that become areas of obsession for some folks. I don’t really deserve to be a panelist, but I’m excited and very interested in this topic!

Banks: One of the values or beauties of having you with us, Father Scott, as someone who doesn't consider himself necessarily a part of these communities, is that we'll be talking about the practical nature of this conversation and how it fits with other ministries – and we look forward to your perspective! A question for all of you: What points of intersection exist between your theological orientation and your nerdy or geek interests?

Robison: My focus is generally more literary, than TV or movies, and I was introduced from an early age to Star Wars, which contains many spiritual connections. My worldview and some of my earliest theological assumptions were based on that world. I also enjoy the Deryni novels of Katherine Kurtz, a bishop in the Independent Sacramental Movement, which speak of the psychic and magic powers of an ethnic minority in a place that might resemble medieval Wales. Its church, though more dispersed than the medieval Church, is very powerful, and there are themes of persecution. Some novels pose deep spiritual questions that go far beyond what is right or wrong. They explore the nature of being human. They probe what it means to be human. They explore questions of evil and theodicy, and questions of good and evil are sometimes answered rather dramatically. From a theological point of view, I'm more interested in current writers of science fiction, like David Weber, who has several series of talks about faith and our relationship with the universe.

Banks: We find a lot of truth in fantasy, even if it is fantastical truth!

Plemmons: I grew up with J.R.R. Tolkien and Star Wars, which was the first movie that I saw in the theater as a big-eyed seven-year-old. It was a great story of good and evil, highlighting the idea that you can take a stand and set yourself as a servant of good, of hope, faith and balance. Like millions of kids, I wanted to be a Jedi! For those familiar with older geek and fantasy, I then started reading Robert Louis Stevenson's medieval fantasy and imagined myself as a knight. Then I read Madeleine L'Engle and was introduced to her Canon – pun intended. Her Canon, John Tallis, was a priest that people could go to when they were fighting great battles of good and evil. I have always identified with such



characters. I'm much more a Ranger or Warrior of the Holy Light, than a Paladin. Elizabeth Moon's *Paksenarrion* speaks of dedicating yourself to good and finding light within you while coping with evil, being deeply harmed, and working your way back from trauma. That's a deep and rich story. Unlike fiction or historical fiction, fantasy writers don't have to match the streets of real cities. They're not stuck with those rules or limits. Instead, they can make anything up, so long as it's relatable to a human audience! They can interrogate human nature, human interactions and human spirits in the freest possible form. They can defy the laws of physics. They can have fun!

Carter: When we evaluate or critique many of these genres—from science fiction and fantasy to even the average horror movie—we have to remember that these works are about us and our place in the universe. Think of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*: It's not ultimately a monster story, except insofar as it examines the monstrous elements in humanity. It explores what it means to be human, the idea of a divine spark animating life, whether our scientific advances tend inevitably toward hubris and a dangerous Promethean overreach, how fear and judgement can be self-fulfilling prophecies, and how being treated inhumanely leaves us misshapen, hurt and hurting. When the new "Dune" movie was coming out, which was obviously based on the *Dune* series, its overlap with what we do and how we serve people was unavoidable. It's a 1965 science fiction novel that left some readers wondering whether its author, Frank Herbert, was unsympathetic towards religion. In his second appendix, though, he shares the last words of his fictional character Toure Bomoko: "Religion must remain an outlet for people who say to themselves, 'I am not the kind of person that I want to be.' It must never sink into an assemblage of the self-satisfied." In the far future, we see a group of sages or "ecumenical translators" who are creating the Orange Catholic Bible of the future, and who are trying to do right and who see the value in religion! They also wrote, "We are here to remove a primary weapon from the hands of disputant religions. That weapon: the claim to possession of the one and only revelation....We are producing an instrument of Love to be

played in all ways.” Within two months of this new Bible’s completion, Herbert writes, 18 of these ecumenical translators were lynched. As the ecumenical officer of the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, I found that work brilliantly insightful. It’s a commentary on religion and humanity, on our desire to do the right thing, and our inability to agree. Even the best of us, who try to do the right thing, must suffer slings and arrows. These stories are the “myths” of our time. They’re not about what they seem to be about. Instead, when they’re done well, they communicate an underlying message about our human experience and what is ultimately Real.

Banks: My personal religious expression flowed from my connection to science fiction, its ideas of good and evil, and the desire of its characters to be good. We see similar ideas in liberation theology and process theology. Star Wars is really just a political drama based on liberation theology! People are persecuted for their religion, and they find liberation in doing the right thing and in saving others who are persecuted. Star Wars challenges us to find the good in others. The principal villain of the original trilogy, Darth Vader, was ultimately a good guy who was a victim of tragic circumstances and in need of the liberation that he later encountered. I read in such stories a call for us to seek out those who need additional support.

Let’s bring some context to this conversation: How has the broader Christian community responded to those who belong to fandom or nerd culture, and in what ways has the Independent Catholic and Independent Sacramental Movements responded?

Robison: When I was youngish, in the 1980s, there was a certain “parent panic.” It was the era of razor blades in apples, of poisoned candy and the “Satanic panic” around Dungeons and Dragons and other role-playing games. The Church has not always comprehended very well geek and fan thinking. In the golden age of science fiction, which often ignores works from before the First and Second World Wars, many writers like Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and Harlan Ellison were generally unpleasant toward religious belief, unless they were trying to make a larger point. Asimov very

famously placed the face of Satan on the mushroom cloud of an atomic test to make the point that these were not toys and that they were not good. In his *Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury wrote of Episcopal priests attempting to “save” Martians from their sinful behaviors—which didn’t work out well for them. The Church has certainly never completely understood the nerd subculture, and the subculture hasn’t always responded very well to the presence of clergy in it. The incomprehension and open hostility leads to push-back. Many of the bad reactions and relationships often come from well-meaning but angry and scared people who don’t do well with things that don’t fit into middle-class, bourgeois assumptions about society and behavior. It also doesn’t help that many members of the core of fandom are on the autism spectrum, which complicates communication. Many of us carry scars from the times in which the Church has attacked our fandom.

Plemmons: I often speak of the difference between two main branches of the Church: the Law camp and the Grace camp. The Law camp relies on fear-based performances of faith. It’s “Fire Insurance Christianity”, where your abject fear is to avoid the fires of hell! As a result, you will do anything to protect yourself or other people from the fires of hell. From this resulted the Inquisition. In many American homes, many teenage kids suffered a similar Inquisition for daring to play a game that is functionally very similar to so many other military tabletop games, a game that boosted their cognitive development and enhanced their strategizing and problem-solving skills. The fear of the fires of hell overtook parents who saw pictures of fighting monsters and demons! This inflicted grave harm on middle-class American kids who just wanted to imagine. As part of my first organized chaplaincy within fandom, I started *Ordo Sanctus Chiros*—a deliberate blending of Greek and Latin—to create healing and a safe place within fandom where fans can say, “They’re Christian—but they’re okay.” Think about that caveat! It’s great to see blogs like Hacking Christianity, where a Methodist minister speaks with geek metaphors, and it’s great to hear my bishop openly speak of being a Trekkie, but there are still a lot of people in the “fire insurance” camp, who fear young people with imagination,

who fear their questions, and fear them stepping “outside the box”! I suspect that if you scratch most members of the ISM below the surface, you’ll find that a lot of us have interests in other things and that we think “outside the box”!

Banks: There’s a powerful connection between the nerd culture and the Independent movement, just as there are many correlations between the LGBT community and nerd culture, and between those who are on the spectrum and those who belong to nerd culture. There’s an overlapping of spaces.

Carter: In the Independent Catholic movement, we tend to “smell like the sheep”. We’re closer to the people than many other shepherds, who might possess a more dominating, imperialistic, “you’re in or you’re out” approach to religion. Many Independent Catholics, like the people we serve, are more eclectic. We have a “passport” that allows us to enter spaces without feeling that we are being contaminated. We can be part of the world and its many subgenres.

Banks: What are some of the ways in which the Independent Sacramental Movement might create more inclusive spaces for those who feel marginalized, particularly for members of the nerd community?

Carter: Perhaps the best way to approach the overlap between these communities and our own here in the Independent Catholic world is to show care and genuine interest. I may not be into something, but if someone I love is into it, that opens up a desire in me to maybe find out about it. If nothing else, it creates a place of potential communication. Any parent of younger people knows their excitement when they are discovering something. This opens possibilities for us to communicate in meaningful ways. The trick is to listen and do our best to discern the opportunities that the Holy Spirit is presenting!

Banks: During my undergraduate studies, one of my professors suggested that all clergy should be required to study the commonalities between the elements of our faith tradition and popular culture. “The Last Jedi,” for instance, might be said to be about the “dark night of the soul,” and the new Disney+ series Obi-Wan Kenobi speaks of the encounter

with reality of an individual with a very strong faith and extremely positive and optimistic ideals. As clergy, we are likely people of strong faith, and we might possess the most optimistic ideals about, say, starting a parish or a new ministry – then we meet opposing realities. The “dark night of the soul” drives a lot of people from ministry and the Church. I’m intrigued by the bridges that might be built between traditional Christian literature – old text texts that fewer people read – and popular culture. Then movies become stepping stones to conversations on elements of our faith tradition.

Robison: We also have to be careful not to ridicule or tease people about the things that they get really excited about. Many people have the idea that science fiction and fantasy are children’s literature. Geeks tend to be like overgrown children when they talk about what they’re reading. These stories speak them in a very direct way! They connect with the emotion in a very strong way. Just think of all the people who connect with Harry Potter! We see ourselves in such stories. We see ourselves in them. If you have Disney+, I highly suggest that you look at their Star Wars stories: Oftentimes they’re some of the most cleverly written stories out there! In “The Mandalorian,” people follow a religious philosophy called “The Way” – a phrase that was not chosen at random! As Father Brett suggests, I’ve actually pulled people into the poetry of St. John of the Cross through Star Wars! I’ve had conversations on Star Trek lead to discussion on the nature of logic and reasoning. Even something as cynical as “Dune” can lead to very deep questions about the nature of blind faith versus informed faith. I suggest that we be open to geeks or nerds in the same way that we are open to any other marginalized person. Listen to them. Embrace differences. Make room for them. Some of us can be extremely prickly, but we’re not bad people. For some members of fandom, these stories provide a language with which we can communicate.

Banks: In all of fiction, the Star Wars character Ahsoka Tano might best represent the Independent Catholic movement. She belonged to the mainline religious order of the Jedi but then left because of the bureaucracy and abuse of power that she witnessed. She didn’t like some of their rules, particularly

with respect to emotional attachment. She views these points of conflict as sources of strength, and she becomes one of the best Jedi in her lifetime. She is a huge figure for people my age, a source of connection for people from my generation: We grew up watching the animated Star Wars show on Cartoon Network—so the majority of people in their mid-20s know who she is. If you say her name, they can picture her. To not know who she would indicate a generational disconnect.

Plemmons: You might be careful in trying to imitate the vocabulary. If I were to use American football metaphors in my classroom, I would screw them up and get an eye-roll from every football player in the room. Instead, I elicit the football metaphors from my students. In the same way, geeks tend to know fairly richly the stories of geekdom. We can tell those stories back to you in snippets. If you drop little references, the geeks will hear them. If you say “may the force be with you” in a liturgical context, every geek will know the reference—and some may even respond “and also with you” (or “and with your spirit”)! If you’re preaching on fear or anger, or how faith leads to hope, quote Yoda: “Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” Even if you don’t say his name, geeks will know the source of those words. If you’re encouraging people to be their genuine selves before God and others, we have a phrase for that, too, at which we take no offense. We say, “Let your freak flag fly!” For the geek community, that means “Do what delights your spirit!”

Banks: Protestant and Catholic pastors often use references to sports or culture as a huge source of connection!

Robison: Other ways that we might connect are through such works as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy*, *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy*, *The Philosophy of Tolkien* and books that explore the religious symbolism of “The Matrix.” There are several books tying popular culture to religion, philosophy and ethics. They are generally written by fans who are ethicists, theologians, philosophers and pastors. We should also be aware of the religious worldview in the works of C.S. Lewis.

Banks: For folks who are interested in making connections, I also recommend *Harry Potter and Philosophy*, *The Simpsons and Philosophy*, and even *Family Guy and Philosophy*. Many of these works are campy – they’re so ironic that they’re over-the-top fabulous. The Church engages in a lot of campy behaviors, too: with the “smells and bells,” vibrant liturgy and ritual. For folks in the nerd community, there’s a lot of campy stuff in the liturgy, which is filled with the imagery of events 2,000 years ago with which people connect in a meaningful spiritual way.

Plemmons: In the case of our kids, we try to connect with them where they are. We might do the same with other folks: Find out what they’re interested in and what they like to talk about. Let them be the expert! Ask questions. Let them teach you. Find a way to connect with them. I had a dear friend who passed. She was an atheist, and I suspect that she looked toward Aslan in the end, but she was also a Tolkien fan, so I preached her funeral with quotes about the great feast from *The Silmarillion*.

Carter: In our role as ministers, we do well to notice the trends in culture that might intersect with our work and with the interests of those whom we serve. There’s great interest now, for instance, in the lived experience of those on the autism spectrum. By learning more about this, we can serve people in a more sensitive and informed way. Another example, if you’re into science fiction, is Martha Wells’ *Murderbot Diaries*. The fundamental concept is brilliant, because the book is not about what it seems to be about. An Android—a human-looking robot with machine intelligence—realizes that it can override its governing circuitry and be self-controlling. This artificial intelligence now has a free will of sorts. Because it was an armed security machine, it realizes its potential as a serial killer. No longer controlled or prevented to do what it formerly could not, it realizes that it has the capacity to do evil! It is self-aware. We all come to the same realization as we grow and mature. We realize that we are capable of deceiving our parents in order to avoid punishment. We present ourselves in certain ways that may not be true to who we are and what we think. These novels are ostensibly about science fiction and artificial intelligence, but we cannot read them without

thinking of our own lived human experience and the lived human experience of others. In *Murderbot Diaries*, the self-conscious machine realizes that it must pretend to be what it is not. It must find a way to pass as human, so it starts downloading all kinds of popular culture, entertainment and anime cartoons, to learn human culture, to better understand humanity, and to properly act as a “human.” The book indirectly addresses folks who are on the spectrum, who may not be neurotypical and who realize that other people may not read them in ways they understand. They’re realizing how they must navigate and present themselves in order to be treated in a fair and understanding way. The same is true of those who work to “pass” in other ways: those who can’t be open about their sexuality, or those mistreated because of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds. They realize that they can’t be entirely open in every interaction, so they learn to “switch codes” and communicate in ways that protect against others misjudging or mistreating them. It’s a human issue. If we pay attention to what is trending or relevant in popular culture, we’ll find all sorts of useful examples that might apply to our church and our ministry.

Banks: As we suggested earlier, the best fiction is real: It’s based on or is a critique or a statement about reality, and the way in which we experience reality

Plemmons: Our challenge is to look for depth in all sorts of things and teachable moments and all kinds of moments. I’m currently watching a Disney+ program called “The Owl House” because my niblings [nephews and nieces] are into it. I’m watching their media and finding openings to talk about deeper stuff with them!

Banks: As you experience new ideas and traverse the deep pool of various fandoms, remember that it’s impossible to be knowledgeable of all of them. That’s impossible, and none of us on this panel are knowledgeable of them all. What’s important, though, is that we look for spaces for connection, looking for ways to share what we have learned. I conclude with the words of Yoda: “Pass on what you have learned: strength, mastery, hmm...but weakness, folly, failure also. Yes, failure, most of all! The greatest teacher, failure is!”



Reflections on  
**Faith & Fandom: A Conversation  
 with Independent Catholic Geeks**

Quintana: Thank you for patiently sharing your knowledge and perspectives with those of us who are less familiar with fandom. We should publish a newsletter to keep other abreast of trends in popular culture: what's coming up, the connections that we might make to our ministries, and the metaphors and symbology that might be useful in our ministries!

Banks: We have shared various articles in *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine. Father John has written of "The Gospel Among the Nerds," and I recently wrote of the Mandalorian and Christianity.

Plemmons: Other geek clergy out there have blogs, too.

Robison: I suppose we could use *Extraordinary Catholics* every so often to try to catch people up or give people a heads-up about the next big thing coming down the pike. I'm really bad at spotting trends, so I tend to focus on things that are currently in the milieu.

D'Arrigo: I'm not an uber geek or as immersed in fandom as Mir or John, but I have participated several times in Dragon Con. You guys serve a population of great need. Mir describes it best: the Church has committed abuse against geeks and the LGBTQIA+ community. Many years ago, I attended science fiction and Star Trek conventions, and a lot of stuff goes on at those conventions, some of which can be quite bad or terrifying. Bad things can happen when you mix drugs, lots of alcohol, and sexually-repressed people. Knowing that there are chaplains there is an unimaginable relief! I imagine that when other churches send clergy to these events, they don't play the same role as you. They might say "what you're doing is a sin" or "you need to get good with Jesus." They might say Sunday mass, but they don't engage in pastoral counseling in the same way that you do. I have celebrated the weddings of a few geeks couples, and I've actually begun with that great line from "The Princess Bride": "Mawwage. Mawwage is what bwings us together today!" Almost everybody appreciates it. There are so

many available cultural references that meet people where they're at. They "break the ice." There's such a value to what you're doing and how you're going about doing it! Would you agree that the best science fiction, fantasy and comic books often contain archetypes, universal characters that we all completely relate to and want to be like, and they're often messianic in some way?

Plemmons: Most of fandom is very aware of this and knows, for instance, that George Lucas was a "disciple" of Joseph Campbell, so we'll see the king, warrior, magician and lover archetypes in Star Wars. So many stories contain the hero's quest told in different ways. As clergy, we have a role in these stories: When the hero is dragging butt, wounded from battle, in the middle of the woods, they see our hermitage! We tend to the wounded. We are the fox in Russian stories that tells the hero what to do. We are absolutely part of these great stories!

Banks: We might also look to the likes of Paul Ricoeur and Sigmund Freud who offer thought-provoking ideas in this respect.

Aguillard: We don't need to "reinvent the wheel." So many traditions tell the same stories in different ways! So much of what we've heard today is simply the retelling of ancient stories in slightly new ways!

Plemmons: You can google the heck out of "hero's journey." Look up Rudolf Steiner as well, since Campbell digested and popularized his work. Carl Jung is somewhat impenetrable, but several people find value in his archetypes.

Robison: I recommend Katherine Kurtz. Robert Chase wrote in the 1980s, though I have mixed feelings with his crossover with Harry Potter.

Plemmons: Harry Potter is problematic at this point. I've removed the Hufflepuff decor from my classroom since J.K. Rowling doubled down against trans identities. I'm unwilling to be seen as anything but a safe place. I walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, but you won't find the Cross of Santiago in my classroom, due to the negative associations there. We have to be careful.

- Banks: Even the actors in Harry Potter have tried to divorce themselves and their work from Rowling. While you wouldn't want to hang Harry Potter décor in your space, you might still have a productive conversation on the topic.
- Robison: *The Parable of the Sower* is a very good sci-fi novel about religiosity and hope
- Plemmons: *The Parable of the Sower* is part of the sub-genre of post-apocalyptic, end-of-the-world books that go back to the 1950s. In reality, they're stories of plucky humans who survive bad stuff and engage in community building and discovering their identity.
- Banks: We haven't spoken today of anime or video games, but they, too, are part of popular culture. There are many video games with extremely ethical questions, with frameworks for determining good and evil, and with some really theological stuff. The Fallout series, where players make their own meaningful choices, contain a lot of religious language and real-life stuff. Last month, a Google employee who self-identifies as a "mystic Christian priest" – perhaps part of the broader Independent movement – stepped up as a whistleblower, saying that Google's artificially-intelligent chatbot generator is self-aware and sentient. His claims are disputed by many engineers, who say that it's simply the result of programming, but it raises interesting questions about the sentience of artificial intelligence. It also raises ethical questions: Should corporations be able to hide such information from us?
- Ellis: Before today, I had a very imperfect understanding of this apostolate to fandom. I think it's brilliant. I think I'm an opera nerd, a Wagner geek! While Wagner, too, can be problematic, there may be an analogy, even if it breaks down rather quickly, with "The Lord of the Rings." Is there a fandom for "The Lord of the Rings" as well, and are there universal themes of Christianity that you might point to in that work as well?
- Robison: Fleming Rutledge, an Anglican Episcopal priest, has written *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien's Divine Design in The Lord of the Rings*, which speaks of various themes and characters. She speaks, for example, about how you can be too righteous. The way that Sam treats Gollum makes Gollum

worse! I have also read Noble Smith's *The Wisdom of the Shire*, which is a good read. Tolkien was a very devout Roman Catholic, and he had issues with the way the mass was translated at Vatican II. I also recommend *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams*. It's a very good spiritual biography of all the "Inklings." There's a lot of literature on Tolkien, and on C.S. Lewis as well. There are also people who have explored how Wagner's "Ring Cycle" might relate to fandom. I've lost feeling in my feet listening to his "Ring Cycle" in sequence!

Ellis: In Wagner's defense, Mark Twain said, "Wagner's music is better than it sounds"! I have read Rutledge's work, *The Crucifixion*. I'll have to check out her other work.

Vanni: This conversation is really comforting. Books have helped me explore iconic moments from every age. I was Meg in *A Wrinkle in Time*. I was one of the kids who walked through the wardrobe. My whole life I've gotten so much out of fiction, fantasy and science fiction. From an early age, I was thrust into spiritual seeking, and people who are spiritually-seeking gravitate to these genres, which invite us to enter into mystery of other possibilities. My mother read along with me, and she read anything that she saw me reading. Even my stepdad ended up reading as a result of the books that I brought home. After I had children, I followed my mother's example of reading with her kids. Our kids are reading an enormous amount of interesting stuff, including post-apocalyptic fiction. They illuminate where popular culture is going – as well as the burdens on people's hearts. I was devastated when I read *The Golden Compass* series for the first time – but my daughter just loved it, and we had some really good conversations. Whether it's the Marvel Universe or "The Lord of the Rings" or Harry Potter, these genres are speaking deeply to our young people, and we can have tremendous spiritual conversations with them. More recently, I fell in love with Octavia Butler when a professor of African American Studies convened to circle to discuss her science fiction from the perspective of her community. We saw things in her work that I was completely blind to. Nora Keita Jemisin is another African-American voice that is emerging in this

genre. I dove back into fantasy and science fiction through audiobooks, which is an awesome way to experience these books. Since my bad accident in 2014, I have listened to an insane number of audiobooks – and it’s been super fun and expansive, and it has been really affirming to sit in this circle today!

Plemmons: I hold the Lewisian heresies. You heard me reference that in my story of my friend who considered herself an atheist. I said it was possible that she looked toward Aslan in the end. Saint Paul says that we now see things dimly, but one day we’ll see God face-to-face. In the last battle in the Narnia books, everyone walks through the door and glimpses this god figure, with all the illusions stripped away, and they must choose whether they will walk away. You can think that you’re serving Tash, but if you’re serving Aslan, Aslan knows better – which is Narnian for “I don’t hear what you call yourself; I see the fruits of the Spirit in you!” I learned lessons like that in Narnia, and they are more or less supported by the Bible.

Carter: It’s not a coincidence that our participation in popular culture and in fandom informs our theology, and vice versa. What we derive from pop culture shapes how we relate to other people. We are a self-selecting group and are positive about certain things that particular types of Christianity may not be open to. Most of us don’t subscribe to the Gnostic, Manichaean cosmology that views the body as bad or evil. We’re all about incarnation, about being embodied. We’re not afraid to get down into the muck. We are not Puritans, saying, “You can’t see that movie!” We are not afraid of being “contaminated” by the world. Instead, we appreciate the goodness and blessing of it. It’s easy for us to see an overlap between our belief in and experience of God, and our appreciation for popular culture, myth, human stories, and representations of the world!

Banks: Our geek identities inform our theological orientation, and our experiences with literature and media can change and inform our experiences of God and the Holy Spirit!

Leary: Like Trish, this presentation has given me a ride down Memory Lane. I was reading about Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon before they were on TV! I read most of Isaac

Asimov's books, and I got hooked on Arthur C. Clarke, whose books made a big impact on me as a child. We didn't have geeks and nerds; we were just "weird"! We participated in the Radio Club or the Science Club. We knew we weren't the jocks, but we didn't realize that we were on the margins. I was 30 years old when Star Wars came out, and I watched it ten times in the movie theater! I was an English major in college, so I would slice books and movies, looking for messianic threads—and they didn't disappoint. I'm not able to keep up with some of the works you've talked about today, but I congratulate you on bridging our faith to fandom and assisting those who are "on the path"!

Robison: I was five months old when Star Wars came out!

Rafferty: As a former Catholic school principal, administrator and teacher, I'm left wondering how we might get this message out to everyone and draw them to the Church and to Christ!

Robison: Part of it is simply showing up. I often wear my collar when I go to see movies. I also wear it at conventions. People don't like being preached at by random people, but they might approach us if they sense that we are "safe." We show up and are present, and they come to us when they're ready to talk!

Banks: We won't always succeed, which is why I like that quote from Yoda. We try to meet people where they are!

Carter: I wonder how different the experience of popular culture is for people from different cultures. Knowing that Poland has an incredible depth in music, graphic arts and film, I'm wondering if Marek might shed light on aspects of Polish popular culture that have been particularly useful in his ministry.

Bożek: I love Tolkien's books, and I have read all of them multiple times, but I don't think I'm qualified to speak on Polish pop culture. Our great Polish science fiction writer was Stanisław Lem, whose books, like *Solaris*, have been turned into Hollywood movies. The *Witcher* series, which is now a popular game and movie, was written by Polish fantasy writer Andrzej Sapkowski. He touches on many themes and creatures from Polish pre-Christian pagan mythology. He

speaks of quests, healers and redemption, with parallels to gospel messages.

Mathias: I have loved sitting at your feet and listening to you all. I am a geek, a bibliophile—but no one has ever accused me of knowing anything about pop culture. Earlier today, I was sharing that I don't even know what "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" is! We thank our panelists today and for all the presenters and panelists of this 2022 Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School! We have enjoyed many thought-provoking themes and the most fascinating conversations. Let's use all that we've learned during these two weeks to increase awareness of the truly extraordinary movement of which we're all part!

## Appendix A

### Presenters & Participants in the 2022 Inclusive Catholic Virtual Summer School

**Rev. Leslie A. Aguillard**

Independent Church of Christ the  
Healer  
Ascension Alliance  
Denver, Colorado

**Damian Baker**

Middletown, New York

**Rev. Brett Banks**

Advocates of St. Sebastian  
Independent Catholic Ordinariate  
Florence, Texas

**Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek**

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish  
Catholic Church  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Most Rev. Jerry Brohl**

The Independent Roman Catholic  
Church  
Wyandotte, Michigan

**Rev. Rosa Buffone**

Holy Spirit Catholic Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Newtonville, Massachusetts

**Dr. Julie Byrne**

Hofstra University  
Long Island, New York

**Very Rev. Scott Carter**

Pilgrim Chapel Of Contemplative  
Conscience  
Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Ashland, Oregon

**Rev. Dr. Patrice Cheasty-Miller**

Ecumenical Catholic Church of  
Australia  
Durham, North Carolina

**Most Rev. Paul Clemens**

Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Nevada City, California

**Very Rev. Canon Michael Angelo  
D'Arrigo**

Agape Fellowship of Greater Atlanta  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Madison, Georgia

**Rev. Joseph Dang**

Catholic Apostolic Church  
International  
Denver, Colorado

**Dr. Megan K. DeFranza**

Center for Mind and Culture, Boston  
Courageous Conversations Coaching,  
LLC  
Beverly, Massachusetts

**Rev. Diane Dougherty**

The Church of the Visitation  
Association of Roman Catholic  
Womenpriests  
Atlanta, Georgia

**Robert Duhon**

Holy Family Catholic Church  
Austin, Texas



**Very Rev. Mike Ellis**

Incarnation Catholic Community  
Mission  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
South Burlington, Vermont

**Rev. River Fallon**

Atlanta, Georgia

**Most Rev. Theodore Feldmann**

Sanctuary of Divine Providence  
Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Rev. Melina Frame**

Apostolic Catholic Church in  
America  
Saint Charles, Maryland

**Rev. Karen Furr**

Our Lady of the Angels Inclusive  
Catholic Community  
Kingman, Arizona

**Rev. Danielle Grace**

Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana

**Most Rev. Tony Green**

St. John of God Parish  
Catholic Apostolic Church in North  
America  
Albany, New York

**Rev. Davi Hayes**

Mustard Seed Eastern Catholic  
Church  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Frederick, Maryland

**Amy Hicox**

Huntsville, Alabama

**Rev. Dr. Edward Jarvis**

United Kingdom

**Most Rev. David John Kalke**

Ecumenical Catholic Church  
Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico

**Most Rev. Dr. Lewis Keizer**

The Home Temple  
Alameda, California

**Most Rev. Alan Kemp**

Ascension Mission Ministries  
Ascension Alliance  
Ascension Theological College  
Gig Harbor, Washington

**Rev. Dr. Martin Kováč**

Bratislava Old Catholic Community  
Old Catholic Church in the Czech  
Republic  
Trnava, Slovakia

**Most Rev. Francis Krebs**

Ss. Clare & Francis Ecumenical  
Catholic Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Rev. Paul M. Leary**

Reformed catholic Church  
International  
Franklin, New Hampshire

**Most Rev. Michael Leavitt**

New Ipswich, New Hampshire

**Rev. Mike Lopez**

All Saints Priory  
Benedictine Missionary of the Poor  
Ridgewood, New York

**Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias**

Holy Family Catholic Church  
Austin, Texas

**Rev. Donna Nachefski**

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish  
Catholic Church  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Most Rev. John F. Newbauer**

St. Mary Magdala Spiritual Center  
Orthodox-Catholic Church of  
America  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

**Rev. Mir Plemmons**

Rainier Open Catholics  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
South King County, Washington

**Most Rev. John Plummer**

St. Basil's Parish  
Nashville, Tennessee

**Rev. Francis A. Quintana, OFR**

Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Denver, Colorado

**Rev. Rory Rafferty, OSB**

Pass Christian, Mississippi

**Rev. John Robert Robison**

Laurel Old Catholic Mission  
Convergent Christian Communion  
Laurel, Maryland

**Most Rev. Jorge Rodriguez Eagar**

Shrine of Holy Wisdom  
Ascension Alliance  
Chandler, Arizona

**Most Rev. Linda Rounds-Nichols**

Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Gallup, New Mexico

**Rebecca Saenz**

Holy Family Catholic Church  
Austin, Texas

**Rev. Kathryn E. Shea**

Association of Roman Catholic  
Womenpriests  
Sarasota, Florida

**Rev. Seamus Smith**

Bethel, Connecticut

**Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni**

Charis Ecumenical Catholic  
Community  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

**Rev. Donald Sutton**

St. Paul Catholic Community of Faith  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Denver, Colorado

**Rev. Lona Mary Turner**

St. Anne Independent Catholic  
Church  
Independent Catholic Ordinariate  
Fort Worth, Texas

**George von Stamwitz**

Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Rev. Jenni Walker**

Cosmic Christ Sophia Community  
Ascension Alliance  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

**Most Rev. Leonard Walker**

Divine Savior Catholic Church  
Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch  
Kingman, Arizona

**Rev. Annie Cass Watson**

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish  
Catholic Church  
Association of Roman Catholic  
Womenpriests  
Saint Louis, Missouri

**Rev. Oliver Lamin Williams**

Orthodox Catholic Church  
Bo, Sierra Leone